

# THE PEASANTS

A TALE OF  
OUR OWN TIMES

IN  
FOUR VOLUMES

AUTUMN  
WINTER  
SPRING \*  
SUMMER †

*\* To be published April, 1925*

*† To be published July, 1925*



## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

*The Peasants* has been translated from the original Polish by Michael H. Dziewicki, Reader of English Literature at the University of Cracow. I wish to make special acknowledgment to Dr. A. M. Nawench of Columbia University for his invaluable assistance in seeing the work through the press.

A. A. K.

PART I  
AUTUMN  
CHAPTER I

“**P**RAISED be Jesus Christ!”  
“World without end!—What, my good Agatha?  
And whither be you wandering now?”

“Out into the world, please your Reverence, into the wide world!” she answered, with a wave of her staff from east to west.

The priest mechanically turned his eyes in that direction, but closed them to the blinding sun in the western sky. Then he said, in a lower and somewhat hesitating tone:

“Have the Klembas turned you out? Or is it only a little bickering between you?”

She drew herself up a little and, before answering, cast her eyes around her upon the bare autumnal fields and the village roofs surrounded by fruit-gardens.

“No, they have not turned me out: how could they? They are good folk and my close kin. And as for bickering, there was none. I myself saw that I had better leave; that’s all. ‘Better to leap into the deep than cumber another man’s wagon.’ . . . So I had to go; there was no work for me. Winter is coming, but what of that? Are they to give me food and a corner to sleep in while I do nothing to earn it? Besides, they have just weaned their calf, and the goslings must be sheltered under their roof at night, for it is getting cold. I have to make room. Why, beasts are God’s creatures, too. . . . But they are kind folk; they keep me in summer-time at least, and do not begrudge me a corner of their house and a morsel of their food. . . . And in winter I go out into the wide world, asking alms. . . . I need but little, and that little good people give me. With the help of the Lord Jesus, I shall pull through till spring, and put something by into the bargain.

Surely, the sweet, good Jesus will not forsake His poor."

"No, that He will not," the priest reassured her in earnest tones, quietly pressing a small silver coin into her hand.

"Thanks, thanks, and God bless your Reverence!"

She bowed her shaking head as low as his knees, while big tears trickled down her face, a face rugged and furrowed like newly-ploughed autumn fields.

The priest felt confused.

"Go, and God speed you on your way," he faltered, raising her up.

With trembling hands she crossed herself, took hold of her wallet and her sharp-pointed staff, and started off along the broad and deeply rutted road toward the forest, turning now and again to glance at the village, the fields where potatoes were then being dug, and the smoke from many a herdsman's fire, wafted low over the stubble.

The priest, who had previously been seated upon a plough-wheel, now returned to it, took a pinch of snuff, and opened his breviary; but his eyes would stray now and then from the red print and glance over the vast landscape slumbering in autumnal peace, or gaze into the pale blue sky, or wander to his men leaning over the plough he was guiding.

"Hey, Valek! That furrow is crooked!" he cried out, sitting up, with his eyes following every step of two sturdy grey plough-horses.

Once more he returned to his breviary, and his lips again moved, but his eyes soon unconsciously wandered to the horses, or to a flock of crows cautiously hopping, with outstretched beaks, in the newly-made furrow, and taking wing when even the whip cracked or the horses wheeled round: after which they would alight heavily in the wake of the plough, and sharpen their beaks on the hard, sun-baked clods just turned up.

"Valek, just flick the right-hand mare a bit; she is lagging behind."

He smiled to see her draw evenly after this correction and, when the horses came to the roadside, jumped up to pat their necks—a caress to which the animals responded by

stretching their noses towards his face and sniffing complacently.

"Het—a—ah!" Valek then sang out. Pulling the silver bright share out of the furrow, he deftly lifted up the plough, swung the horses round, and thrust the shining steel into the earth again. At a crack of the whip, the horses set tugging till the cross-bar creaked again; and on they went, ploughing away at the great strip of land which, stretching out at right angles to the road, descended the slope, and, not unlike the woof of some coarse hempen stuff, ran down as far as the low-lying hamlet nestling amongst the red and yellow leaves of its orchards.

It was near the end of autumn, but the weather was still warm and rather drowsy. The sun was still hot enough and, hanging in the south-west above the woods, made the shrubs and the pear-trees, and even the hard, dry clods, cast strong, cold shadows.

Ineffable sweetness and serenity reigned in the air, full of a golden haze of sunlit dust over the fields lately harvested; while above in the azure heaven, enormous white clouds floated here and there like great wind-tormented snow-drifts.

Below, as far as the eye could see, lay the drab-hued fields, forming a sort of huge basin with a dark-blue rim of forest, a basin across which, like a silken skein glittering in the sunshine, a river coursed sparkling and winding among the alders and willows on its banks. In the midst of the hamlet, it spread out into a large oblong body of water, and then ran northward through a rift in the hills. At the bottom of the valley, skirting the lake, lay the village, with the sunlight playing on the many autumnal hues of its fruit gardens. Thence, even up to the very edge of the forest, ran the long bands of cultivated ground, stretches of grey fields with thread-like pathways between them, whereon pear-trees and blackthorns grew; the general ashen tint being in places variegated by patches of gold-yellow lupines with fragrant flowers, or by the dull silver of the dried-up bed of some torrent; or by quiet sandy roads, with rows of



tall poplars overshadowing them, reaching upwards to the hills and woods.

The priest was suddenly roused from the contemplation of this scene. A long, mournful lowing was heard at no great distance, making the crows take wing and fly away obliquely to the potato-diggings, their dark fluttering shadows following them over the partly sown fields. Shading his eyes with his hand, he gazed in the direction of the sun and the forest, and beheld a little girl coming towards him and leading a large red cow by a rope. As she approached, she said: "Praised be Jesus Christ!" and would have gone out of her way to kiss the priest's hand, but the cow jerked her away and fell a-lowling anew.

"Are you taking it to market?" the priest asked.

"No, only to the steer at the miller's.—Be still, you pest! Are you possessed?" she cried, out of breath, and striving to master the animal, which, however, dragged her along till both disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Presently there came along the sandy road, trudging heavily, a Jewish ragpicker, who trundled a barrow so loaded down that he had to stop for breath every now and then.

"What news, Moshek?" cried the priest.

"What news? Good news to those it may concern. Potatoes, God be praised! are plentiful; there's a good crop of rye, and cabbages will be abundant. It's all very well for such as have potatoes and rye and cabbages." He kissed the priest's sleeve, adjusted the barrow-strap, and went on more lightly, his way now leading down a gentle slope. In his wake, along the middle of the road and in the haze of dust raised by his dragging feet, came a blind beggar, led by a well-fed dog at the end of a string. Then a lad carrying a bottle approached from the side of the wood. The latter, catching sight of the holy man on the road, gave him a wide berth and made for the village tavern by a short cut through the fields.

A peasant from the next hamlet, on his way to the mill, and a Jewess driving a flock of geese, then also passed by.

Each praised God; the priest exchanged some kind words and friendly looks with them, and they went on their way.

By this time the sun was low. The priest got up and called to Valek: "You will plough as far as the birches, then home. The poor beasts are quite tired out."

Going along the path between the fields, he said his Office under his breath, looking round from time to time at the scene with fond, glistening eyes. Working-women gleamed in red rows at the potato-diggings, and the contents of their baskets rumbled into the carts. Here and there, the ground was still being ploughed for sowing. On the fallows a herd of brindled cows was feeding. The ashen-grey hue of certain lands was beginning to take on a ruddy tint from the blades of corn already sprouting there. On the close-cropped, tawny grass of the meadows, the geese showed up like white snowflakes. A cow was heard lowing afar. Fires had been lit, and long blue clouds of smoke trailed over the cornfields. Elsewhere harrows were at work, a dim cloud of dust rising in the wake of each and settling down at the foot of the hills. From beneath it, coming as it were out of a cloud, a bareheaded, barefooted peasant, with a cloth full of corn tied round his waist, was pacing leisurely, taking handfuls of grain and scattering them all over the earth with a solemn gesture, as one bestowing a blessing. On reaching the end of the ploughed fields, he would turn and slowly ascend the slope, his shock of touzled hair first appearing above the sky-line, then his shoulders, and finally his whole body, still with the same solemn gesture, the sower's benediction, that shed forth upon the soil, a holy thing as it were—the golden seed which fell in a semicircle round him.

The priest's pace became more and more leisurely: now he would stop to take breath, now to look at his two grey horses, now to glance at a few boys who were throwing stones into a large pear-tree. They came running to him in a body, and, holding their hands behind them, all kissed the sleeve of his soutane.

He stroked their flaxen heads, but added a word of warn-

ing: "Have a care not to break the branches, or you will get no pears at all next year."

"We were not throwing stones at the pears," answered one boy, bolder than the rest; "there's a chough's nest up in the tree."

The priest passed on with a friendly smile and was presently among the potato-diggers.

"God speed your work!"

"May God reward you!" they replied in a chorus, and all came up to kiss their beloved pastor's hands.

"Our Lord has given us plenty of potatoes this year, I think," he said, offering his open snuff-box to the men, who respectfully accepted; refraining, however, from taking snuff in his presence.

"Aye, potatoes are as big as a cat's head, and plenty to each plant."

"Ah, then pigs will rise in price; you will all want to have some to fatten."

"They are dear enough as it is. There was a swine plague last summer, and we have to buy them even in Prussia."

"So there was, so there was. And whose potatoes are you digging here?"

"Why Boryna's, of course."

"I don't see him with you, so I wasn't sure."

"Father is only at the forest with my goodman."

"Oh, there you are, Hanka? How goes it?" he said, turning to a handsome young woman who wore a red kerchief round her head. She came forward, and, her hands being soiled, threw her apron over them as she took the priest's hand to kiss.

"Well, and how is your little boy whom I christened in harvest time?"

"God bless your Reverence, he is well and lively."

"The Lord be with you all!"

"And with your Reverence!"

He walked away to the right, where the burying-ground, near a road planted with poplars, lay on that side of the village. They gazed after him in silence for some time, and

it was only when his thin and slightly bent figure had passed the low stone enclosure and entered the mortuary chapel, overshadowed with the yellowish and reddish foliage of birches and maples, that they found their tongues again.

"There is no better man in the whole world," said one of the women.

"Yes, indeed," chimed in Hanka, emptying her basketful on to a yellow heap conspicuous on the freshly furrowed soil and dry stalks. "They would have taken him away from us to town, but father went with the Voyt<sup>1</sup> to entreat the Bishop, and so they did not get him. But dig away, you, dig away: the day and the field are both drawing to a close."

They set again to work in silence. Only the crunching sound of the hoes in the hard ground, with now and then the sharp clink of steel upon stone, was to be heard.

Less than a score of workers were there, most of them old women and farm-labourers. At some distance were fixed two couples of crossed poles from which, swathed in cloths, a couple of babies were swinging as in hammocks, and wailing now and then.

"Well, and so the old woman has gone off a-wandering," Yagustynka said after some time.

"The old woman? Who?" asked Anna, straightening herself.

"Why, old Agatha."

"What, a-begging?"

"Of course a-begging! No, not for the pleasure of the thing. She has been working hard for her kinsfolk, serving them all summer long; and now they let her go—to get some fresh air! Next spring she will return, with baskets full of sugar and tea, and some money, besides. Oh, they will be fond enough of her then, and cover her up snugly in bed, and tell her that she must not work, but just rest up. Oh, yes! and they will call her 'Aunt,' till they have got the last bit of money out of her. But when autumn comes round again, there will again be no room for her—not even

<sup>1</sup> *Voyt*—the headman of the community.—*Translator's Note.*



in the passageway, not even in the pigsty. Oh, those blood-sucking kinsfolk! Those inhuman beasts!"

Yagustynka put such passion into her outburst that her face turned livid as she spoke.

An old farm-labourer—a wry-faced worn-out man—remarked: "Here you see how true is the saying: 'The wind is always blowing in the face of the poor.'"

"Now, good people, please dig away," interrupted Hanka hastily; she did not like the turn the conversation was taking. But Yagustynka, who could not hold her tongue, soon looked up and said:

"Those Pacheses,—they are getting on in years; the hair is thin upon their heads."

"And yet," another woman put in, "they still remain unmarried men."

"And there are so many girls growing old here, too, or forced to take service elsewhere!"

"Yet, they have a score of acres and more, besides a meadow beyond the mill."

"Aye, but will their mothers let them marry, do you think, or let them have anything if they do?"

"Yes, who would then milk the cows, or do the washing, or tend to the farm and the pigs?"

"They have to keep house for their mother and for Yagna. Else how could Yagna be the grand lady that she is? Quite a gentlewoman, always dressing up, and washing herself, and peering into her glass, and for ever braiding her hair!"

"And looking for someone to share her bed—any able-bodied young man will do," added Yagustynka with a malicious sneer.

"Joseph Bandech sent 'proposers'<sup>1</sup> to her with a gift of vodka, but she would not have him."

"A plague on her, the pampered minx!"

"And the old dame, too: always in church, and praying

<sup>1</sup> Two men go to the girl's family, offering vodka in the young man's name; if the girl drinks to him, she is regarded as affianced.—*Translator's Note.*

out of her prayer-book, and going wherever there's an indulgence!"<sup>1</sup>

"She's a witch, all the same. Who was it that made Vavrek's cows dry up, pray? And, ah! when Yashak's little boy stole plums from her orchard, and she muttered evil words against him, did he not get the *koltun*<sup>2</sup> at once, and shrivel up with crooked limbs?"

"Oh, how can God's blessings descend upon a place where such creatures dwell?"

"In former days," Yagustynka observed, "when I was still tending father's cattle, they used to drive such people out of our midst. . . . Aye, and it does them no harm, for they are not without protectors." Then, lowering her voice, and casting a side-glance at Hanka, then busily digging in the foremost row, Yagustynka whispered to her neighbours: "The first to defend her would be Hanka's goodman; he follows Yagna everywhere like a dog."

"For God's sake! Pray, hold your tongue. What awful things you are telling us! Why, that's an offence against God, a sin!" the gossips whispered to her, as they went on digging with bowed shoulders.

"Is he, then, the only one? Why, all the lads are after her, like cats after their kind."

"Indeed, she is good-looking: plump as a well-fed heifer, with a face as white as cream, and eyes even as the flax-flower. Strong, besides; many a man no stronger."

"For what does she do but eat and sleep? No wonder she is comely."

A long silence ensued while they emptied their baskets on to the heap. Afterwards the talk ran on other subjects, till Yuzka, Boryna's daughter, was seen coming at a run across the cornfields, from the village, and they stopped. She came, panting and all out of breath, shouting from a distance:

<sup>1</sup>An annual local festival held in every parish, where those who come to church may gain an indulgence.—*Translator's Note.*

<sup>2</sup>*Koltun*—a diseased, matted condition of the hair.—*Translator's Note.*

"Hanka, come home: there's something wrong with the cow!"

"Mercy on us! which cow?"

"White-and-Red."

Hanka heaved a sigh of relief. "Good God! how you frightened me! I thought it was mine."

"Vitek brought her in but now; the keeper had driven them out of the wood. She ran too fast—she is so very fat,—and fell just outside the byre. She neither eats nor drinks; only rolls about and bellows. Mercy on us!"

"Is father home yet?"

"No, he is not. Oh, good Lord! Such a cow, too! She gave more than a gallon at each milking. Oh, do come, quick!"

"Yes, yes, quick as thought—instantly!"

She at once took her child out of the cloth in which it hung hammock-like, and came away so alarmed at the news that she forgot to let down the apron with which she had tucked her dress up to the knees for work. And, as she followed Yuzka, her white legs twinkled across the fields.

The potato-diggers, working with their hoes between their feet, went on more slowly, having no one to hurry or to chide them any more.

The sun, now quite in the West, glowing red as if heated by its rapid course, hung like a huge crimson globe above the high, black woods. Twilight was deepening and spreading over the landscape; filling furrows, hiding in ditches, gathering under thickets, and slowly pouring over the land; deadening, blotting out and wiping away all colours, until the tree-tops and the churchroof and steeple alone glowed with gorgeous hues. Many labourers were already plodding homewards.

Shouts and neighings, and bellowings and the rattling of carts, growing ever louder and louder, filled the quiet evening air. But presently a tinkling from the belfry announced the Angelus; and at the bell's sonorous vibrations, these noises were all hushed, and only whispered prayers, like the faint sound of falling leaves, were audible.



And now the cattle, driven home with merry cries and songs in a confused multitude, came along the roads stirring up such a volume of dust that only now and then were their mighty, thickly-horned heads seen to emerge from it.

Sheep, too, bleated here and there, and flocks of geese, flying off the pasture lands, were lost in the Western glow, so that only their shrill, creaking cries betrayed the fact that they were on the wing.

"A pity that White-and-Red was with calf."

"It is a good thing that Boryna is not poor."

"A pity, all the same, to lose so fine an animal."

"Boryna has no wife, everything he has goes as through a sieve."

"Because Hanka is no sort of housekeeper, you know."

"Oh, but she is—for herself. They lodge with her father as if they were farm-labourers; each of them is on the lookout for what can be got out of him. As to Boryna's property, let the dog watch over it!"

"Yuzka is a child, and knows nothing. What can she do?"

"Well, Boryna might as well give up his land to Antek, might he not?"

"Yes, indeed, and live on the portion they will allow him?" Yagustynka returned hotly. "You are old, Vavrek, but a great fool for all that. Ho, ho! Boryna is still hale: he may marry again. If he gave all he had to his children, he would be an ass."

"Hale he is, but over sixty."

"Never fear, Vavrek; any girl would have him, if he only asked her."

"He has buried two wives already."

"May he bury a third, then, and, God help him! Never while he lives let him give his children the least bit of ground;—no, not so much as a foot of it. The carrion! They would give him a fine portion, they would! Force him to work on the farm, or starve, or go far off to beg! Yes, turn over what you have to your children; they will



give you just enough, to buy a rope to hang yourself or to tie a stone round your neck with!"

"Well, it's getting dark; time to go home."

"Yes, it is time; the sun is going down."

So they quickly shouldered their hoes and, taking their baskets and dinner pails in hand, went off in single file along the path, old Yagustynka always passionately holding forth against her own and everybody else's children.

A girl was going home in the same direction, but by another path, driving a sow with its little ones and singing in a shrill voice:

"Oh, go not near the wagon,  
Nor with its axle play,  
Nor let a young man kiss thee,  
Whatever he may say!"

"Listen to that idiot howling as if she was being skinned alive!"

## CHAPTER II

A GOOD many people had gathered by this time in Boryna's yard, which, surrounded on three sides by farm buildings, was separated from the road by an orchard on the fourth. Several women were offering advice and eyeing with amazement the very large red-and-white cow that lay wallowing on a heap of manure just before the byre.

An old dog, somewhat lame and with hairless patches along its sides, was now sniffing at her and barking, now running to the fence and driving back into the road such boys and girls as had climbed up and were gazing curiously into the yard, and now approaching a sow that lay near the hut, suckling four white little pigs and gently grunting.

Hanka ran straight to the cow on arriving, and at once began to stroke her face and head.

"Poor, poor dear Red-and-White!" she cried, with copious tears and many lamentations.

From time to time the women would recommend her a new remedy for the sick animal. Now they would pour brine down its throat, now milk into which wax from a consecrated taper had been dropped. One advised soap dissolved in whey, and another suggested bleeding. But the cow did not benefit from any of these nostrums. At times she would lift up her head, and, as though imploring for help, low till her beautiful large eyes, with pink-tinged whites, grew dim and misty. Then, quite exhausted with pain, she would bow her horned head and put forth her tongue to lick Hanka's hand.

"May not Ambrose be able to do something?" was one woman's suggestions.

"Yes, yes, he knows a good deal about sicknesses."

"Run to him, Yuska. He has just rung the Angelus, so is likely to be somewhere about the church. Good God! when Father comes home, how furious he will be! And yet," Hanka sobbed, "'tis no fault of ours!"

She then sat down on the threshold of the cow-house and bared her full white bosom to the babe that was wailing for food, meanwhile watching the suffering animal with keen apprehension and, expecting Boryna's arrival, casting uneasy glances past the fence.

In a few minutes Yuzka returned, announcing the arrival of Ambrose, who came almost as soon himself. He was close to a hundred years old, one-legged, and walked with the aid of a staff, but still as straight as an arrow. His face, dry and wrinkled as a potato in spring, was clean-shaven, but scarred; his hair as white as milk, with long wisps falling on his forehead and hanging down to his shoulders. He went straight to the cow and looked her over very carefully.

"Oho!" he said, "you will have fresh meat presently, I see."

"Oh, but pray do something to make her well!" cried Jozia. "A cow worth over three hundred *zloty*<sup>1</sup> . . . and just now with calf, besides! Do help us! Oh, dear! Oh dear!"

Ambrose produced a lancet, whetted it on his boot, looked at the edge against the sky, and then cut a blood-vessel in Red-and-White's belly. But no spurt of blood followed; only a few drops, black and foam-flecked, oozed out slowly.

All were standing about, their necks craned forward, breathless with attention.

"Too late!" he said mournfully. "Yes, the poor thing is near its last gasp. It must be cattle plague or something of the sort. You should have sent for me as soon as there was anything the matter. Those women! Peevish things they are, fit only to weep! When anything's to be done, they only fall a-bleating. A lot of ewes!"

<sup>1</sup> *Zloty*. A Polish coin, formerly worth about seven cents.



He spat contemptuously, looked once more at the cow's eyes and tongue, wiped his gory hands on her sleek hide, and prepared to go.

"I shall not ring for her funeral; your pots will clink instead."

"Here come Father and Antek!" exclaimed Yuzka, hastening to meet them as a rumbling sound came from the farther end of the pond and a long cart and horses appeared, looming dark against the red glow of dust blazing in the light of the setting sun.

"Father, Father! Red-and-White is dying!" she called out. He was just turning the pond. Antek had got down behind; the pine they had on the cart was a long one, and had to be held up.

"Don't waste your breath talking nonsense," he growled in reply, lashing the horses.

"Ambrose has bled it—in vain. Melted wax down her throat—in vain, too. Salt—no use. . . . 'Tis the cattle-plague, no doubt. Vitek says the forester drove them out of the grove, and all at once Red-and-White lay down and started to moan; and so he brought her back here."

"Red-and-White, our best cow! You foul beasts! The devil take you for the care you took of her!"

He threw the reins to his son and ran forward, whip in hand.

The women drew away. Vitek, who had all the time been very calmly doing things about the house, ran off, faint with fear, into the garden. Even Hanka stood up on the thresh-hold, bewildered and dismayed.

Old Boryna looked long at the cow and then cried out:

"Yes, she is gone, and because of them! The filthy sluts! Always ready to eat, but to watch—never! Such a splendid animal! One cannot stir from the house, but that some harm and evil must come of it."

Hanka murmured in excuse: "But I have been out potato-digging all afternoon."

He turned on her in a rage. "You! Do you ever see anything that goes wrong? Do you care one pin for the



things that are mine? Such a cow as 'twould be hard to find—aye, even at a manor farm!"

He went on lamenting for some time, examined the cow, tried to make her stand up, and looked into her mouth. She was breathing heavily, with a rattle in her throat. Her blood had quite ceased to flow and formed hard, black clots like cinders.

"What's to be done? She must be killed: I'll save at least as much as that will bring us."

Thus making up his mind, he went into the barn for a scythe. After sharpening it with a few turns of a grindstone that stood under the eaves of the cow-house, he pulled off his coat, tucked up his shirt-sleeves, and set about his grim task.

Hanka and Yuzka began to weep as Red-and-White, as though feeling death close at hand, raised her heavy head and, moaning faintly, fell flat, with her throat cut. Her legs jerked convulsively once or twice.

The dog lapped the blood, which was already beginning to clot.

Antek, who had just arrived, angrily addressed his weeping wife:

"What have you to weep over, foolish one? Father's cow is father's loss, not ours!"

And he set to unharnessing the horses, which Vitek took to the stable.

"Is the potato crop good?" Boryna inquired as he was washing his hands by the well.

"Why shouldn't it be good? Twenty sacks or thereabouts," was the reply.

"They must be brought in this very day."

"Bring them in yourself, then," said Antek. "I am dead tired and ready to drop. The off-horse, too, is lame in one foreleg."

"Yuzka, go and tell Kuba to stop digging. Let him put the young mare to instead of the off-horse, and bring the potatoes home to-day. It may rain."

Boryna was boiling over with anger and mortification. Every now and then he went to gaze at the slaughtered cow and swore outrageously. Then he strode across the yard, looked into the byre, the barn, and all the sheds, being so confused by his loss that he did not know what he was doing.

"Vitek! Vitek!" he roared at length, unfastening the broad leather girdle round his waist. But Vitek did not answer his call.

All the neighbours had disappeared, feeling that such sorrow for so great a loss was likely to end in blows, and Boryna was at no time indisposed for a fight. To-day, however, he did nothing but curse and swear.

Going toward the hut, he cried through the open window: "Hanka, give me something to eat!" and passed in to his own quarters.

The hut was the usual peasants' cabin, divided into two parts by a very wide passageway. The back looked out upon the yard; the four front windows, upon the orchard and the road. Boryna and his daughter, Yuzka, occupied the side next the garden; Antek and his family lived on the other side; while the herdsman and the labourer slept in the stable.

The room was now getting dark, for but little light could filter through its tiny windows, the eaves that overshadowed them, and the trees of the orchard beyond. Only the sheen of the glass that covered the holy images hanging in dark rows from the whitewashed walls, could be seen. The room, though large, looked smaller on account of the low ceiling, with the great beams supporting it, and the amount of furniture which filled the whole place, leaving only a little free space about the big penthouse fire-place that stood close to the passage wall.

Boryna took off his boots there, then entered a dim alcove, and closed the door behind him. He removed a shutter from a small pane of glass, and the sundown at once flooded the closet with blood-red light.

It was a small lumber-room, crowded with household

articles. Poles were fixed across it, from which hung many a striped cloth and *sukmana*;<sup>1</sup> there were piles of grey spinning-yarn, and fleeces rolled into dingy bales, and sacks of feathers. He took a white *sukmana* and a scarlet girdle, and then for a long time fumbled in certain tubs full of grain; also in a corner, underneath a heap of odds and ends—leather and iron fumbled together. But, hearing Hanka in the next room, he quickly replaced the shutter, and again started groping in the tubs of corn.

His supper, an enormous pot of cabbage stewed with fat bacon, was now smoking on a bench just beneath the window. The odour of that mingled in the air with the smell of scrambled eggs in a big dish close by.

"Where did Vitek take the cattle this morning?" he asked, cutting off a mighty piece from a loaf of bread as large as the largest sieve.

"To the manor copse; and the forester drove them out."

"The carrion! It is they who have killed Red-and-White!"

"Yes, she was so tired and overheated with running that something inside her got inflamed."

"Those beggarly dogs! We have a right to graze our cattle there. It is down in black and white, in letters as large as an ox: yet they always drive us away, and say we have no right there."

"They have done the same to others, too. They have beaten up Valek's boy, too, most sorely."

"Ah! I shall go to court, or else to the Commissioner. She was worth three hundred *złoty*, if she was worth a *grosz*!"

"Surely, surely," assented Hanka, greatly relieved to see her father less angry with her.

"Tell Antek that as soon as they have brought the potatoes in, they must see to the cow—skin her and cut her up. I shall lend a hand when I get home from the Voyt's. Hang the quarters from the rafters, out of the reach of dogs and vermin."

<sup>1</sup> *Sukmana*—a long coat worn by Polish peasants.—*Translator's Note.*



Having finished his meal, he got up to dress for the visit, but felt so heavy and drowsy that he flung himself on the bed, just as he was, for just forty winks of sleep.

Hanka cleared the things away, going to the window every now and then to peep at Antek, who was taking his supper under the porch in front of the house. He sat at a civil distance from the platter, taking spoonful after spoonful with a hard but leisurely scrape against the sides of the vessel. At times he would cast a glance over the pond, whose waters gleamed with moving circles of purple and gold, iridescent in the sunset. Amongst these, like white clouds round a rainbow, swam a flock of geese, gabbling and spurting streams of blood-red jewels from their beaks.

The village was seething with life and crowds of people. On the road at either side of the pond, the dust flew and carts rattled; and lowing cattle stood knee-deep in the pond, drinking at leisure and lifting their ponderous heads, while from their jaws streams of water trickled down like strings of opals. Meanwhile, on the farther side, washerwomen were at work, and the bats they wielded clattered loudly on the linen they were beating.

"Antek, please split the firewood for me; I cannot manage it by myself," said his wife timorously, for the man thought nothing of treating her to an oath—nay, even to a blow—on the slightest pretext.

He did not so much as reply, feigning not to have heard her. She dared not repeat her request, but went to hack off such splinters of firewood as she could, while he, moody and spent with a long day's hard work, sat looking over to the other side of the pond, where a large cottage shone with whitewashed walls and window-panes that reflected the sunset glow. A low stone fence, over which some clusters of dahlias nodded their heads, standing out vividly on the white background of cottage wall, ran round the garden; and in front of the house a tall figure was seen to pass from beneath the orchard trees, disappearing in the passage before it could be recognized.

From the porch where he sat, Antek heard his father's

snores and growled fiercely. "The Master sleeps; and *you*, toil on, labourer, toil on!"

He went out into the yard and eyed the cow again.

"She was father's cow, but it is also a loss for us," he remarked to his wife, who had left off hacking wood and gone to the cart which Kuba had now driven home.

"The pits are not yet ready for the potatoes; we must dump them upon the threshing-floor."

"But father said you were to flay the cow and quarter it on the threshing-floor, with Kuba to help you."

"There will be room enough for both cow and potatoes," muttered Kuba, throwing the barn door wide open.

"I," said Antek, "am no slaughter-house workman, that I should flay carcasses!"

No more was said; the potatoes rattled noisily on the barn-floor.

The sun was down, but the dark blood and dead gold of the after-glow were still mistily reflected in the pond; and the quiet waters just trembled, shimmering ruddily with a drowsy murmur.

Presently the village was lost in shadows and plunged in the deep stillness of an autumnal night. The huts seemed smaller, as though sunk into the ground or melted into the trees that hung dreamily above them, or made one with the grey fences surrounding them. Antek and Kuba were carrying the potatoes. Hanka and Yuzka, busy with their household duties, were driving the geese home or feeding the swine that came grunting for food into the passage. Then the cows wanted milking. Vitek had just come home with them from the pasture-lands, and had put a little hay on the racks before them, that they might remain quiet while being milked.

Yuzka had just begun with the first cow, when Vitek asked her in a low trembling voice: "Yuzka, is master very angry?"

"Oh, Lord! that he is! He means to give you a thrashing!" she answered, turning her face to the light and putting



out her hand, for the cow, tormented by flies, was whisking her tail, which struck the girl.

"But was it my fault if the forester drove us out? He would have given me a beating, too, but I got away. And she lay down and lowed and moaned, so I came back with her."

He said no more, but she heard him sniffing and weeping quietly.

"Vitek! you are crying like a calf. Don't! Is it the first time father has thrashed you?"

"No, indeed, but I can't bear being thrashed; I am always afraid."

"How silly! A great husky fellow, and afraid? But I'll explain it all to Father."

"Will you really, Yuzka?" he exclaimed joyfully.

"I will, Vitek; only fear no more!"

"If you will,—then here's a bird for you," he whispered, much pleased, and took a marvellous toy out of his bosom. "Just look how it moves, all by itself!"

He placed it on the threshold and wound it up. The bird, lifting up its long legs and shaking its head, began to walk.

"Oh Lord! it's a stork! and it moves as if alive!" she cried out in wonder and, setting her milk pail aside, crouched down and gazed on in rapture.

"Oh, how clever you are to have made it! and it moves by itself, does it?"

"By itself, Yuzka; only I wind it up with this wooden peg. And see! it is strutting about like a gentleman after dinner!" He turned it about. The bird, lifting up its long legs, with comical gravity, strutted on, moving its neck back and forth.

They both started to laugh, heartily amused by these movements; and from time to time Yuzka glanced admiringly at the boy.

Suddenly Boryna raised his voice, calling to Yuzka from outside the cabin.

"Here I am," she answered.

"Come to me."

"I can't; I'm milking."

"Well," he said, "I am off to the Voyt," and added, peeping into the dark shed: "That, that there bastard, isn't he here?"

"Oh, Vitek do you mean? He is gone with Antek," she replied hastily and with uneasiness, for Vitek, terrified, had come to crouch behind her.

"He has run off! . . . A rank beast he is . . . to let such a cow be lost!" he snarled, returning to the hut to put on his new white *sukmana*, and a high-crowned black hat. Then, buckling on a scarlet girdle, he set off in the direction of the mill.

"So much work still to do!" he said to himself as he walked on; "all the winter's firewood to be brought in, some fields not yet sown, and the cabbages still out of doors! The potato-fields, too, must be ploughed; and so must the oat-fields. My God! a man's work is never done; he is like an ox under the yoke. And that law business, besides! . . . A bad one she is, truly: I slept with her indeed! . . . May her tongue rot away, the vile creature!" He spat venomously, filled his pipe, and with some difficulty kindled a damp match by striking it on his trouser-leg.

Then he jogged along slowly, still brooding over his troubles and the death of the cow.

Now he was as lonely as a signpost. There was no one he could complain or tell things to. . . . He had to think of everything, and make up his mind, and care for everything all by himself—a dog's life! . . . Never could he speak to anyone, nor get any advice or assistance . . . and the result was, loss upon loss!

The hamlet was now getting dark. Through the wide-open doors and windows (for the evening was warm) there came from the glowing hearths streaks of light, and the odour of cooked potatoes, and porridge with dribblets of fried bacon. Many were supping in the passages, or even outside the cabins, and talking merrily to the clatter of spoons.

Boryna's pace slackened; he was exhausted with the excitement he had gone through, and the thought of the wife he had buried that spring recurred to him and made him gulp down a sob.

"Oh, no! if *she*—how well I recollect her to-night!—if she had been here, Red-and-White would still be alive. Yes, she was a housewife, indeed, a rare housewife. It's true, she had a sharp tongue, and never a good word for anyone: but she was a good wife and manager, for all that." And then he breathed a prayer for her soul, very sore at heart in the remembrance of times gone by.

When he used to come home, all tired and weary, she would give him the best of everything; and time and again would she hand him, on the sly, savoury bits of sausage that she had secreted for him from the children. And, somehow, they throve very well then. Calves and goslings and suckling pigs multiplied; on fair days, there was always plenty to take to town; always cash at hand, and money put by for a rainy day.

And now?

Antek was continually pulling his own way, as was his son-in-law, the blacksmith—always trying to get something out of him. Yuzka?—A frail child, with bran instead of brains in her head; and no wonder, for she was still under ten. And Hanka? She fluttered about like a moth, was for ever ailing, and did nothing but whine like a dog.

So everything was going to rack and ruin. Red-and-White had to be killed that day, a pig died at harvest-time; while the crows had carried off so many goslings that but half of them remained. Such losses! Such disasters! All he had was being frittered away, running out like water through a sieve!

"But I won't give in!" he almost cried aloud: "as long as I can move these limbs of mine, not one acre shall be given up to anyone!"

"Praised be Jesus Christ!" someone greeted him as he passed.

"World without end!" was his instinctive reply as he



turned off from the road into a long-fenced lane at the end of which, some distance back from the highway, stood the Voyt's cottage.

The windows shone brightly. The dogs started to bark, as Boryna walked straight into the best room.

"Is the Voyt at home?" he asked of a stout woman kneeling close to a cradle and suckling a baby.

"No, but he will be presently. Sit down, Matthias; there's someone else waiting for him, besides." And the woman threw her chin forward in the direction of a beggar sitting by the fire—the blind old man we have met before, led by a dog. The chips that were burning on the hearth threw a hard reddish light on his large shaven face, his bald crown, and his wide-open eyes, drawn over with a white film and motionless under grey brows.

"Whence has the Lord led you hither?" asked Boryna, seating himself on the opposite side of the fire.

"From up and down the world, good man; and how were it otherwise with me?" was the answer given in a drawling, plaintive voice, while its owner, who listened attentively to each sound, pulled out a snuff-box.

"Pray take a pinch, good man."

Matthias complied, and such a large pinch did he take that he sneezed three times and the water came to his eyes.

"Awfully strong stuff," he said, and wiped the tears away with his elbow.

"Petersburg snuff, very good for the eyes. May it be so—for yours!"

"Come round to my cabin to-morrow, will you? I have killed a cow."

"God reward you. Boryna, I believe?"

"Ah! you are good at guessing."

"Knew you by your voice and speech."

"Well, coming from up and down the world, what news have you?"

"Ah! what indeed? Some news is good, some bad, and some indifferent. The way of the world. They all complain and lament when it comes to giving a beggar some-

thing; and yet they have always money enough for vodka."

"You speak truly; it is just as you say."

"Ho, ho! I have been a wayfarer on this God's earth long enough to know a thing or two."

"What," the Voyt's wife then asked of him, "what has become of the foundling who came with you last year?"

"Ah! the vile creature! he ran away, filching a pretty good sum out of my wallet. Some good people had given me a little money, and I was taking it to Our Lady of Czes-tochowa to have mass said, when the wretch stole it and made off. . . . Be quiet, Burek! It's the Voyt, I imagine." And at a pull on the string that held it, the dog ceased barking.

He was right. The Voyt came in and, standing on the threshold, threw his whip into a corner and shouted:

"Wife! Supper! I'm starved. How are you, Matthias? And you, old man, what do you need?"

"I have come to ask about the affair I am to appear in to-morrow."

"I can wait your pleasure, sir. Put me in the passage; it shall be well with me; or if, because I am old, you set me by the fire, there I shall sit. Give me to eat of your potatoes or a morsel of bread, and I shall pray for you just as much as if you gave me a kopek or more."

"Sit down. You may sup here and spend the night, too, if you will."

And the Voyt sat down to a steaming dish of newly-mashed potatoes, made savoury with abundant driblets of fried bacon; a platter of sour milk standing close by.

"Take a seat, Matthias, and share what we have," said the Voyt's wife cordially as she laid a third spoon on the table.

"No, thanks. When I got home from the forest I ate a generous supper."

"Take a spoonful at least; the evenings are getting long."

"Plenty of prayers, plenty of food,  
Never does harm, always does good,"

the beggar put in sententiously.



Boryna stood upon ceremony for a time, but at last the smell of the bacon in his nostrils got the better of him. So he sat down and began to eat, but slowly, daintily, and with great decorum.

The blind man's dog now began to move about uneasily and to whine impatiently for food.

"Be quiet, Burek! The farmer folk are at supper now. You will get your share, don't fear." So spoke the blind man soothingly as he was warming his hands at the fire and inhaling the savoury odour.

When the first pangs of hunger had been appeased, the Voyt, turning to Matthias, said: "Eva has, it appears, lodged a complaint against you."

"She! Oh, well, I declare! Not paid her, indeed? As there is a God, I have—aye, and beyond what she deserved. Yes, and when she had that baby I willingly sent the priest a sack of oats for her at the christening!"

"But she says it was you who——"

"Oh, but that's preposterous! What, is she mad? Is she crazy?"

"Oho! Old as you are, you are still an able craftsman!" And the Voyt and his wife burst out laughing.

"To be old," put in the blind man, "is to know; to know is to be able."

"But she lies like a gipsy! I never touched her, the wench! She was homeless; an outcast who begged and prayed us to take her in—just for the food and a corner to sleep in, because winter was near. I was loath to do it, but my wife that's dead thought we had better. She could do things in the house. Why should we hire a servant when one was ready at hand? I did not like this—another mouth to feed, and in winter, too, when there's always less to be done. But my wife said: 'Don't worry; she knows how to weave cloth and canvas. I'll see to it that she is not idle, and there will always be some work or other for her.' Well, she stayed on with us and got strong; and presently she was with child. But the question is, who was the man?"

"You, according to her."

"I'll kill her for saying so! The miserable liar!"

"Anyway, you will have to appear in court."

"I shall. God reward you for telling me this. I thought it was about her wages: but I have witnesses to prove that I have paid her. A plague on her! A scold, and a beggar into the bargain!—Dear me! one trouble after another! I shall never be able to stand all this. And the cow I have had to kill! And the field-work not yet done! And here I am, all alone, with no one in the world to lend a hand!"

"Who for a wife that's gone must weep is like a wolf-encompassed sheep," the old man observed.

"I heard about the cow; they told me in the village."

"As to that, I have a claim against the manor. The forester, I understand, drove the cows away. She was the best of all I have—worth three hundred *zloty*—was with calf—ran so fast and got so blown that I had to kill her. No, I shall not let that pass: I'll bring suit."

The Voyt, however, who was friendly to the manor, strove to calm Boryna: anger was always a bad counsellor, and he should beware of doing anything rash. Then, to change the subject, he said with a wink at his wife:

"Man, you ought to marry, so as to get someone who would take care of the house."

"I say, is this a joke? Why, last Assumption Day I rounded my fifty-eighth year. What are you dreaming of? And she, too, scarcely cold in her grave yet!"

"You just take a wife, one fit for your age, and all will be well with you again, Matthias," said the Voyt's wife, preparing to clear the table.

"For, sure, a good and kindly wife is the crown of her husband's life," added the blind man, groping for the dish which the woman had set before him.

Boryna sat wondering why the thought had not occurred to him before. Certainly some woman or other was to be found, and any one would be better than none.

"Some," continued the old man as he ate, "are silly and speechless, some are quarrelsome, some pull the lads' hair,

and others are always dancing or running after music in taverns; but, anyhow, a man is better off with one than without."

"But what would people think of it?" objected Boryna.

"Think? Will they give you back your cow or help you in anything, whatever they think?" the Voyt's wife retorted with much heat.

"Or warm your bed for you?" said the Voyt with a laugh. "There are so many lasses here that, when a man goes about the huts, he is as hot as coal in a fire."

"Ah! the reprobate! look at him! Whom is he hankering after now?"

"Sophie, Gregory's daughter, might do; a slim handsome girl and a good dowry, too."

"What does Matthias, the richest farmer here, want with a dowry?"

"Of goods and lands and such, who ever has too much?" queried the blind man.

"No," the Voyt decided, "Gregory's girl is not for him—too young, too immature."

"Then Andrew's daughter, Catharine," was the next proposal made by the Voyt's wife.

"Already taken. Roch's son, Adam, sent proposers to her yesterday."

"Well, there is Weronka, Stach's daughter."

"A babbler, a gadabout, and with one hip deformed."

"But what about Thomas's widow? She would do very well, I fancy."

"Three children, four acres, two heads of cattle, and an old sheepskin that poor Tom left her."

"Perhaps Ulisia, Adalbert's daughter, who lives by the church?"

"She might do for a single young man. The boy she has is now big enough to tend cattle. But Matthias has his own cowherd, and needs none."

"There are others yet to be married; only I seek someone suitable."



"But, wife, you have overlooked one who would be just the girl for him."

"Who is that?"

"Why, Yagna, daughter of Dominik."

"To be sure; she had escaped my memory."

"A bouncing wench and tall; no fence but would break under her weight."

"Yagna!" repeated Boryna, who had been silently listening to this roll-call; "but they say she runs after men."

"Who has seen her? who knows? Gossips will gossip for gossiping's sake and for envy," cried the Voyt's wife, hot in her defence.

"Oh, I did not say she was that way, but it's common talk. Well, now, I must be off." He adjusted his girdle, put a live coal to his pipe, and pulled at it twice or three times.

"And for what hour is the summons?"

"For nine o'clock; so it stands in black and white in the District Court. You will have to rise early, if you are going there on foot."

"I shall take the filly and drive slowly. God be with you, and thanks for your good cheer and neighbourly advice."

"May God go with you, too. And think over what we have been telling you. Say but the word, and I will go to the old dame with vodka for you; and we shall have a wedding before Yule-tide is out."

Boryna answered not a word, but gave them a parting glance that might mean anything.

"When old with young to wedlock fly, the devil is glad, for he profits thereby," was the blind beggar's reflection as he finished the mashed potatoes. Boryna walked homeward with slow steps, seriously meditating on the advice given him. At the Voyt's he had carefully kept from letting it be known by any sign whatever that the idea was extremely to his liking. How could he? He was not a young whippersnapper, who would at the bare mention of marriage be



ready to dance and shout for joy, but a grave, elderly farmer.

Night had already enshrouded the earth. The stars glistened in the sky's sombre depths like silver dew-drops, and all was still, save for an occasional bark of a dog or two. Faintly and far between, a few lights twinkled athwart the orchard trees, and now and then a breath of damp air blew up from the meadows, making the boughs wave slightly and their leaves whisper soft sounds.

Boryna was making for home by another way—direct and leading down over the bridge, under which the waters of the pond, rolling towards the mill, with a hollow bubbling sound, poured into the stream. He then crossed to the other side, skirting the pond, where the waters shone darkly and the trees along its shores cast gloomy shadows over its surface, framing it in ebony; though near the centre, where the shadows were lighter, the twinkling stars were reflected as in a mirror of steel.

Matthias himself could not have said why he did not now go straight home, instead of chosing a roundabout way. Did he want to pass in front of Yagna's house? Possibly he meant only to collect his thoughts and revolve matters within his head.

"Really, it would not be a bad thing. And what they say of her is all very true. Yes, she is a strapping girl!"

A shiver ran through him. It was damp and cold near and about the pond and he came straight from the Voyt's cosy fireside.

"Without a woman at home, I must either be ruined or make over the farm to my children," he thought, and then: "And she's a lusty wench, and as pretty as a picture. My best cow gone to-day! and who knows what else will go to-morrow? Perhaps I ought to look out for a second wife; my first one has left things to wear a plenty. But Dominik's old widow . . . she is a wicked creature!—Three of them, and fifteen acres: about five for Yagna, besides her share of the cabin and the livestock. Five acres of fields—the very ones beyond my own potato-patch. To-

gether with mine, they will make close to thirty-five acres. A nice bit of land!"

He rubbed his hands and set his girdle straight. "The miller would be the only man richer than I. Next year, I would manure and till the whole of my lands for wheat. I would have to purchase another horse. And a cow too, in place of poor Red-and-White.—Oh, but then she would bring a cow of her own. . . ."

So he went on musing, calculating, and dreaming farmers' dreams, till the weight of his thoughts became, he felt, too big for his mind. For he was marshalling every detail, like the intelligent peasant that he was, and considering whether he had not possibly overlooked anything of importance.

"They would raise a hue over it, the rascals!" he said to himself, thinking of his children. But at the thought there rushed over him a wave of indomitable self-confidence, which immediately filled his soul and confirmed him in his purpose, wavering and undecided as he had been hitherto.

"The land is my own. Let anyone else dare claim my property! If they don't like it, they may . . ." Here he broke off, for he was then standing in front of the cabin where Yagna dwelt.

The lamps were not yet out, and a long streak of brightness from the open window, passing through the dahlia bushes and the hedge, illumined the road. Boryna, standing in the shadow, glanced into the room.

A big fire was evidently burning on the hearth, for the crackling of pinewood could be heard; and the great room, though dusky in the corners, was elsewhere filled with a reddish light. The old dame, crouching close to the fire-place, was reading something aloud; and Yagna, dressed only in her smock, her face turned to the window and her sleeves tucked up to the shoulders, was engaged in plucking a live goose.

"A comely wench!" he thought.

She would raise her head now and then, listen to the reading, and heave a deep sigh. Then she would again set to plucking the goose, but so roughly that the bird would



gabble audibly with pain, and, escaping from her hands, flap about the room till the feathers were flying everywhere. But she would soon quiet it and hold it fast between her knees, the bird uttering only a few faint cries, to which other cries responded from the passage and the yard.

"A handsome girl, she," he mused and walked away at a rapid pace, for the blood had gone to his head. Raising his hand to his brow, he drew tightened his girdle as he walked.

He was already within his own gates, and had passed the fence, when he looked round at Yagna's dwelling, which stood opposite on the other side of the water. Someone was just then going out, for a quick flash from the opening door lit up the pond. Heavy footsteps were heard tramping along, and the splash of a bucket of water was audible; then at last, amid the darkness and the mists which had come up from the meadows, a voice sang to a slow tune:

"Betwixt us rolls the flood, O grief!  
How can I send a kiss from here?  
I'll float it down upon a leaf  
And waft my love to thee, my dear."

He listened long, but the voice was heard no more; and after a while all the lights were put out.

The moon, now in her full, had risen above the forest-trees, silvering their tops, throwing its radiance through their boughs and upon the pond, and peeping down into the cottage windows. The dogs no longer barked. An unfathomable stillness had settled over the village and over all nature.

Boryna made the round of the yard, took a look at the horses that snorted as they munched their provender, and put his head into the cow-byre, the doors of which stood open because of the heat. The cows were lying and chewing the cud with the low murmurs peculiar to cattle.

He closed the granary doors and, taking off his hat, entered his cabin and said his evening prayers half aloud. All were sleeping. He undressed quietly and went at once to bed.

He could not sleep, however. The coverlet was so hot that he drew it from over his feet. His head, too, was teeming with many a troublesome and worrisome thought. Besides, he was not at his best physically.

"Sour milk," he muttered, "as I always say, is not good to take of an evening."

And then he thought about his children and pondered over what had been said of Yagna, till all this became muddled and confused in his brain. He knew not what to do, and was on the point (as once had been his wont) of calling for advice to the sleeper in the other bed:

"Mary! Am I to marry or not?"

But he remembered in time that his Mary had been lying in the churchyard ever since the spring. Yuzka was there, asleep and breathing heavily. And he was a poor desolate man, with no one on earth to advise him. So he gave a deep sigh, crossed himself, and said a few Ave Marias for the soul of his departed and for the souls of all the faithful in purgatory.



### CHAPTER III

WHEN daybreak began to shed its light on the cabin-roofs, and dispel the night, and make the stars to fade, things were already moving about Boryna's hut.

Kuba had left the stable. There was hoar frost on the ground, and it was yet grey dawn; but the East flaunted a tinge of burning red, and the frosty tree-tops likewise. He stretched himself with satisfaction, yawned more than once, and went to the byre to call Vitek; for it was time to rise. But the lad only lifted his drowsy head, and whispering: "Presently, Kuba, presently," laid it down again.

"Well, sleep a little more, poor fellow! sleep yet a little more!" Kuba covered him with a sheepskin coat, and limped away; for he had once received a bullet in the knee, which lamed him for life. He washed at the well, ran his fingers through his scanty hair, that had got matted during the night, and, kneeling down on the stable threshold, proceeded to say his prayers.

The master was still in bed, when the cabin-windows took a purple tint in the ruddy glow of morning. Kuba's rosary glided through his fingers; he prayed for a long time, his eyes wandering nevertheless over the yard, the windows, the orchard with the hoar-frost still not melted on the trunks, and the apple-trees, laden with fruit as large as his fist. Then he threw something at the white head of Lapa, the dog which slept in the kennel close by; but Lapa only growled, curled up, and slept on.

"What, you rascal! would ye sleep till sunrise?" he cried, and threw missile after missile, till the dog came out, with a stretch and a yawn and a wag of its tail, and, approaching

him, proceeded to scratch itself and cleanse its shaggy coat with its teeth.

"And unto Thee, and also unto all Thy Saints, do I, O Lord, offer up this my prayer. Amen."

He beat his breast many times, rose from his knees, and called out to Lapa:

"O you dainty dog you, hunting for fleas like a lass going to a wedding!"

Being an industrious fellow, he now set to work, taking the cart out of the shed and greasing the wheels, giving the horses a drink, and filling the racks with hay till they snorted with pleasure and pawed the stable floor. Then he brought from the granary some refuse of corn plentifully seasoned with good oats, which he took to the mare's manger: for she had been given a stall apart.

"Eat, old girl, eat away; you are to have a foal, and you need strength. Eat away!" He stroked her over the nose; and the mare laid her head on his shoulder, and playfully pulled at his shock of hair with her lips.

"Till noon, we shall be bringing in potatoes, and then we shall go to get litter in the evening. Never fear; a cart of litter is no great weight; don't worry."

"But you! for you there's a good flogging in store, you lazy brute!" he said to the gelding that stood close by and was pushing its head forward between the boards that separated it from the mare's manger.

"You hireling, you Jew! Willing enough to devour good oats, you are; but to move one step, save for the whip—not you!"

He passed it by, and looked into the manger that stood next to the wall, from which the filly's head—chestnut-coloured, with a white arrow on the forehead,—had for some time been watching him; and she uttered a gentle neigh.

"Easy, little one, easy! And eat your fill; you will take master to town. . . ." But her flank was soiled, and he wiped it clean with a wisp of hay. Such a full-grown filly, ready for coupling . . . and yet so dirty! Always wallow in the mire like a sow!"

So he went on, talking continually, and passed round to the sties, to let out the pigs that were squealing for food. Lapa followed him, looking wistfully into his face.

"Want something, eh? Here you are then—a nice bit of bread for you!" He took a piece of bread from his bosom and tossed it into the air. Lapa caught it, and ran away to his kennel, for the pigs would have taken it from him.

"Ha! those swine, they are like some men: all for grabbing what's not theirs."

In the barn he took a long look at the quartered cow that hung from the beams.

"A beast without understanding. Gone in her turn. She will be in the pots by to-morrow. Poor thing! you end by making a Sunday dinner for us."

With a sigh of longing for the feast in store, he went to rouse Vitek. "'Twill be sunrise directly. Come, drive the cows to grass."

Vitek had no mind; he wrapped his sheepskin round him and grunted; but in the end he got up, and shambled drowsily about the yard.

The master had overslept himself; for the sun was up, up, making the hoar-frost a dust of rubies, and each pane and pool a mirror of fire, and no one had as yet appeared from the cabin.

Vitek sat on the cowbyre threshold, scratching himself and yawning audibly. The sparrows had come down from the roofs to the well, and were now bathing in the troughs. He took a ladder, and went to look at the swallows' nests under the eaves; for it was very still there, and he feared they might have died of cold. Several swallows lay there, benumbed. Taking them out very gently, he placed them within his shirt-bosom.

"See, Kuba, see! they are dead!" And he showed him the bodies, stiff and stark. Kuba took them one by one, laid them to his ear, breathed on their eyes, and gave his opinion.

"They are only numb with last night's cold. Silly things,



not to have left for some warm country yet! Ah, well!" And he went about his work again.

Vitek seated himself in front of the cabin, where the sunbeams poured down upon the whitewashed walls, and flies were already crawling. He took out such swallows as the heat of his body had revived a little; he breathed on them, opened their bills, gave them to drink from his own warm lips, until at length they were restored, opened their eyes, and fluttered to get free. Then, swiftly catching a fly on the wall, he would feed it to a bird and let it go.

"Away to your mother, fly away!" he said, as the young swallows sat on the rafters of the byre, preening themselves and twittering their thanks, as it were.

Lapa, sitting on his hind quarters, looked on with keen interest, whining now and then, running a few paces after each bird to catch it as it fluttered off, and then returning to watch proceedings.

"You might as well try to catch the wind," said Vitek, so absorbed in reviving the swallows, that he took no note of Boryna coming round the hut, until the latter stood in front of him.

"Ha! you filthy knave! Playing with birds, are you?"

The lad jumped up to run for it; but the farmer caught him fast by the coat-collar, while with his other hand he undid the broad thong of tough leather which formed his girdle.

"Oh, but don't beat me, don't beat me, pray!" was all the poor fellow could utter.

"What sort of a cowherd are you, hey?—That's how you tend cattle, hey?—Lost my best cow for me, hey?—You foundling, you!—You Warsaw mooncalf!" And he laid on furiously, wherever he could get a blow home; and the thong whistled in the air, and the lad writhed like an eel and roared for mercy.

"Don't! O Lord! He's killing me! Master! O Jesus, mercy!"

Hanka peered out to see what the matter was; Kuba spat with disgust and withdrew into the stable.

Boryna continued flogging him with might and main, scoring his loss upon the lad's flesh with a vengeance, while Vitek shrieked and yelled at the top of his voice. At last the poor wretch managed to wriggle out of his master's clutch, and holding his posteriors with both hands, ran to the fence, roaring as he ran: "He has killed me! My God! he has killed me!" while the swallows that were still in his bosom, fell out and were scattered along the road.

Boryna, still breathing threats against him, returned to the cottage and looked into Antek's quarters.

"What!" he cried out on seeing him. "Still abed, and the sun up so long?"

"I had to rest. Was tired to death yesterday."

"I am going to the law court. You will bring home the potatoes; and when that work is done, send our people to get litter. You might yourself drive in laths to make the hut a winter coating."<sup>1</sup>

"Do that yourself; there is no wind on our side."

"As you please. I will do my side; and you, Mr. Sluggard, shall freeze."

He slammed the door, and entered his own quarters. The fire was lit and Yuzka was going to milk the cows.

"Give me breakfast instantly: I must be off."

"I can't be in two places, nor do two things at once."

And she went out.

"Not one quiet minute! I am forced to curse and fall foul of everybody," he said to himself, and proceeded to dress in a very vile humour. What everlasting rows with his son, so that at every word each was ready to fly at the other—or worse—to say something that stabbed you like a knife! His ill humour, as he pondered, increased so, that he could not help cursing under his breath, and flinging his boots here and there about the floor.

<sup>1</sup> Polish peasants, in order to keep their huts warmer in winter, put round them a sort of palisade of laths over a yard high, the space between is then stuffed with hay, dry leaves, boughs, etc., often mixed with clay.—*Translator's Note.*

"They ought to obey me, and they don't. For what reason?" he asked himself.

"Because, no doubt, a cudgel, and a good one, is needed to deal with them. I ought long since to have used one. But I did not care to raise a scandal in the village, and could not make up my mind to do that. For I am not a beggarly ploughman; thirty acres are mine. Nor am I of a mean family; Boryna is a well-known name.—But kindness is thrown away upon them!" And then he remembered his son-in-law, the blacksmith, who was setting everyone against him, and continually pressing for a gift of six acres of cornland and one of forest, "willing," he said, "to wait for the rest."

"That is, till I am dead! Oh, yes," he thought bitterly, "you will have to wait, fellow! While I live, you'll not have so much as a smell at my land! You're too clever by half!"

When Yuzka came in from milking, the potatoes were on the boil, and breakfast was soon ready.

"Yuzka, you will sell the meat yourself! To-morrow is Sunday, and people know that we have it, so they will be coming. But no credit, mind! Keep the hind quarters for our own eating. You will call in Ambrose to salt and pickle them."

"But the blacksmith too can do that."

"He'll take his share—the wolf's share of the sheep!"

"But Magda will be hurt. 'Tis our cow; is she to have nothing?"

"Then cut off a piece and send it to Magda: but don't call in the blacksmith."

"Father dear, that's kind of you!"

"All right, little one. Take good care of things here, and I'll bring you a roll or something from town."

He made a pretty good meal, girt himself up, smoothed down his scanty dishevelled hair, took his whip, and looked round the room.

"Is there anything I have forgotten?"

He would have looked into the alcove too, but Yuzka's



eye was upon him: so he merely crossed himself, and went out.

Sitting in the cart, with the reins in his hand, he gave one more order to Yuzka, who stood in the porch.

"When they have done digging the potatoes, send them off to rake up the litter: you'll find the permit stuck behind the picture. . . . And tell them to cut down some young fir or hornbeam: it will come in handy."

The cart had got as far as the fence, when Vitek showed himself among the apple-trees.

"I had forgotten . . . Vitek! Prrru, prrru! Vitek, I say! you will take the kine to the meadow. . . . And tend them well, or you'll get such a flogging as you won't forget."

"Oh, you may kiss—" the lad cried audaciously, and vanished on the other side of the barn.

"None of your impudence! If I get down, you'll see!"

He turned to the right into the road by the church. The sun was by now above the cottages, with ever stronger and stronger rays. From the thatches mists rose up, and water-drops dripped down; but in the shadows of the hedges and ditches, the frost lay white. On the pond, the thin film of morning haze had grown thinner; the waters bubbled and shone in the sunlight.

In the village the round of daily toil was commencing. Folks were livelier and more spirited than usual in this bright cool morning air: some going forth in troops to dig in the fields, carrying hoes and mattocks, and baskets with provisions; some setting out to plough the stubbled fields; some with harrows in carts, and bags full of seed-corn; whilst others wended their way to the wood for litter, and bore rakes on their shoulders. And on either side of the pond the noise increased, when presently the roads became crowded with cattle driven to grass; dogs barked, men shouted, and a heavy dust which the night's dew had but partly laid, rose in the highway.

Boryna carefully threaded his way among the cattle, from time to time cracking his whip at some lamb or calf that would blunder across the filly's path; and at last he got clear

of them all, and approached the church, which was screened by a great rampart of limes and plane-trees, with dull yellow foliage. Thence he passed on to a broader road, planted on either side with giant poplars.

The bell had been rung to announce that mass was beginning, and the muffled notes of the organ came from within; he doffed his hat and breathed a devout prayer.

The way was solitary, and strewn with fallen leaves, which covered, as with a carpet of dead gold, all its deep holes and ruts, and the gnarled roots about its surface: a carpet striped by the falling shadows of the poplars, as the sun shone across the way.

"Gee-up! my little one, gee-up!" He cracked his whip, for the road sloped upwards, though slightly, towards the forest, black in the distance.

The silence made Boryna drowsy; he gazed through the colonnade of poplars upon the fields bathed in the rosy radiance, and tried to think of Eva's accusation and of Red-and-White's death; but he could not help feeling slumber coming on. Birds were chirruping in the boughs; through the tree-tops murmured the wind, here and there bringing down a leaflet, like a golden butterfly, that settled with a whirl on the road, or on some dusty clump of thistles, whose fiery eyes opened bravely to the sun. And the poplars talked one with another, and murmured softly with swaying boughs, and then were still.

It was only when he had reached the forest, and the horse stopped, that he woke up completely.

"The corn is coming up nicely here," he mused, gazing sunwards at the grey fields, with their rust-coloured haze of sprouting rye.

"A good bit of land, and next to mine—just as if it had been put there on purpose!—This rye, I think, was not sown long ago." He cast a longing glance at the recently harrowed lands, and then, uttering a sigh, entered the forest.

Here, however, a cold bleak wind, driving in his face, quite dispelled his reverie.

The forest was very old and very great. It stood, com-



pact and thick, in the majesty of age and strength combined. Nearly all the trees were pines; but not unfrequently an ancient spreading oak would appear, or some birches, in their smocks of white bark, let their tangled yellow foliage float in the air. The lower growths—the hazel-nut, the dwarf hornbeam, and the trembling aspen—were crowded around the mighty red pine-trunks, so closely and with branches so intertwined, that the sunbeams could but seldom touch the ground, where they seemed to be crawling, like bright-hued insects, over the mosses and reddish faded ferns.

"All this is mine. Four acres," he reflected, devouring the wood with his eyes, and gloating over the best bits of timber.

"Ah! the Lord will not let us be wronged! Nor will we let people wrong us, either! The manor folk think what we have is too much: we think it too little.—Let me see: my four, and Yagna's one; four and one's . . . Gee-up! foolish beast! Afraid of magpies?" He whipped her up smartly; for, upon the dry Tree, where the crucified Christ was hanging, magpies were quarrelling so violently that the filly had pricked up her ears and stopped short.

"'Magpies' quarrelling, rain will surely bring,'" he muttered, and with a few strokes of the whip mended the filly's pace to a trot.

It was now well past eight, for the people in the fields were sitting down to breakfast, when he came to Timow: a small town whose empty narrow streets were lined with dilapidated houses, like rows of old saleswomen—lining gutters full of rubbish, and dirty Jewish children, and pigs.

He had scarcely entered, when crowds of Jews and Jewesses rushed round him, eager to look into his cart and fumble among the straw it was strewn with,—even under the seat—to find anything he might have to sell.

"Off, ye scurvy louts!" he growled, turning into the market-place, where, in the shadow of a few ancient decayed chestnut-trees slowly dying in the centre of the square, hard on a score of wagons were drawn up, their horses unharnessed.

He drove his own cart in there among them, brushed off



the straw from his coat, and went straight to Mordko the barber's, to get a shave. Presently he issued thence, clean-shaven, and with only one cut on his chin, plastered with a bit of paper, through which the blood oozed.

The court was not yet open; but in front of the building that stood right in the market-place, opposite a very large church, a good many people had already assembled, and were sitting upon the time-worn steps, or lounging outside the windows. Women squatted along the white walls, chatting together, with the red aprons they had worn on their heads as they came, now fallen on to their shoulders.

Boryna perceived Eva holding her boy by the hand, and surrounded by her witnesses. A storm of anger surged within him. He spat contemptuously, and withdrew into the corridor that ran the whole length of the officials' private lodgings. The judgment hall was to the left; the secretary occupied the right side.

Just then the manservant Yacek had passed the threshold of the lodgings with a samovar, and was blowing it so hard that it smoked like a factory chimney. From time to time a shrill angry voice was raised from the extremity of the smoke-darkened corridor.

"Yacek! the young ladies' shoes!"

"Presently, presently."

The samovar was now hissing, and spouting flames, and burning like a volcano.

"Yacek! water for master to wash!"

"Yes, yes, directly, directly!"

Perspiring, distracted, the man ran to and fro about the corridor till it rang again, and returned to blow, and went off anew; for his mistress now screamed:

"Yacek, you rascal, where are my stockings?"

"Confound this devil of a samovar!"

The scene continued for some time yet; but at last the door of the court opened, and in the people rushed, filling the large whitewashed hall.

Yacek was there again, now in his capacity as usher: barefooted, but in a dark-blue jacket and trousers of the

same hue, and brass buttons. His red face perspiring freely, he wiped it with his sleeve as he slipped in behind the black grating by which the hall was divided into two parts. Tossing his head like a horse attacked by a gadfly (for his sandy hair fell over his eyes and into them), he sat down for a moment's rest near a huge stove of green delf tiles, after peering cautiously into the adjoining room.

So many people had come in that the place was chock-full. They pressed against the grating till it shook, and after a time began to talk, the murmur of voices soon filling the whole room.

Under the windows outside, Jews were vociferating; within, women clamorously expounded their wrongs, and still more clamorously wept over them; but what those wrongs were, no one could make out. Everybody was cheek by jowl, like a field of red poppies or of rye, waving to and fro in the wind, and rustling and whispering; all clustered together.

It was then that Eva caught sight of Boryna, upright against the grating, and heaped insults upon him, till she cut him to the quick and he answered hotly:

"Silence, you bitch, or I'll give you such a drubbing that your own mother won't know you!"

Eva, in a fury, clawed at him, and tried to reach him through the press; but her kerchief fell off, and her child fell a-screaming. What might have happened, none can say: for just then Yacek started up, opened an inner door, and shouted:

"Hold your peace, yokels! The court is entering."

It was indeed: the stalwart squire of Raciborowice, followed by two assistant magistrates, and the secretary. The latter, sitting down at a side-table, set some papers in order, and eyed the magistrates, as they put their gold chains round their necks, and took their places at a great table, covered with crimson cloth.

At once there fell such a silence that the men chattering outside the windows could be plainly heard; and the session began.



The first complaint was brought by a constable against a petty trader, on account of some nuisance in his yard.—Condemned in default.

Then the case of a boy flogged for having put horses to graze in clover.—A compromise: five roubles for the mother; a new jacket and trousers for the boy.

A complaint of encroachment in ploughing.—No evidence: set aside.

A case of theft of timber in a forest, the judge's property: complainant, the administrator; defendants, the peasants of Rokiciny.—Fined, with alternative of a fortnight's imprisonment. They gave notice of appeal, and made such a noise about the injustice of the sentence, they having the common right to cut firewood in the forest, that the head magistrate made a sign to Yacek, who thundered:

"Silence! silence in the court! This is not a tavern!"

And thus case after case, like furrow following furrow, was dispatched, evenly and quietly enough in general, with a few lamentations and sobs, or even curses at times; but these were promptly suppressed by Yacek.

Some of the people had withdrawn; but so many more came instead, that they all stood like corn-stalks in a sheaf. No one could move, and it grew stiflingly hot, until the magistrate ordered the windows to be opened.

And now came the case of Bartek Koziol, of Lipka, accused of stealing a sow from Martianna Paches, daughter of Anthony. Witnesses, the aforesaid Martianna, her son Simon, Barbara Pyesek, etc.

"Are the witnesses present?" asked one of the assistant magistrates.

"We are here," came the reply in chorus.

Boryna had hitherto stood patiently apart, close to the grating; but he now approached Paches to greet her; for she was no other than Dominik's widow, Yagna's mother.

"Let the defendant come up to the grating."

A low-statured peasant pushed forwards.

"Are you Bartek Koziol?"

The peasant, seemingly bewildered, scratched his thick



hair, of roundhead cut; a silly grin twitched his dry clean-shaven face, and his small red-fringed eyes kept leaping like squirrels from one judge to the other.

As he answered nothing, the judge repeated the question.

"Aye, aye, that he is; he is Bartek Koziol, an't please the most honourable court!" cried an unwieldy woman, forcing her way inside the grating.

"What do you want?"

"An't please you, I am the wife of this poor thing, Bartek Koziol"; and extending her hands, palms downwards to the floor, she bowed till her frilled cap touched the magistrates' table.

"Are you a witness?"

"A witness, did you say? No, but please . . ."

"Usher, outside the grating with her."

"Get out, woman; this is not your place."

He seized her by the shoulders and forced her back.

"An't please this most honourable court," she cried, "my husband is hard of hearing!"

"Out, before I treat you roughly!" Yacek roared, pushing her against the grating till she groaned with pain.

"Go peaceably; we shall speak loud enough for your Koziol to hear."

The examination began.

"What is your name?"

"My name? Surely you know it, since you have called me. Is it my nickname you want?"

"Dolt! give your name," said the inexorable magistrate.

"Bartek Koziol, most honourable court," his wife replied for him.

"How old?"

"How am I to remember? Mother, what age am I?"

"Fifty-two next spring, I think."

"A farmer?"

"Oh, yes: three acres of sandy land and one head of cattle; a fine farmer I am!"

"Ever sentenced?"

"Sentenced?"

"Were you ever put in prison?"

"Is it convicted you mean?—Mother, was I ever in prison?"

"Yes, Bartek, you were—through those rotten manor folks, on account of a dead lamb."

"Ah, so I was.—I found a dead lamb in a pasture-meadow. Well, was it to be eaten by the dogs? So I took it; and they lodged a complaint against me, and swore I had stolen the beast, and the court passed sentence. They put me in prison, and there I had to lie.—But it was unjust—unjust!" he said in a low voice, and casting a side-glance at his wife.

"You are accused of stealing a sow, the property of Martianna Paches: of taking it out of the field, driving it to your hut, and killing and eating it. What defence have you?"

"I never ate it. If I did, may God forsake me at my dying hour! I eat it?—Well, I declare!"

"What defence have you?"

"Oh . . . defence?—Had I aught to say, Mother?—Ah, I remember now.—Yes: not guilty. I did not eat the sow, and this same Martianna Dominik's widow is even as a barking dog!"

"Oh, what liars some men are!" the Dominik woman sighed.

"Explain how Paches' sow got into your hut."

"Into my hut—Paches' sow?—Mother, what did the honourable squire say?"

"Why, Bartek, he asked you about the pig that followed you to our hut."

"Oh, I know . . . I know now. I pray the honourable court to excuse me and listen to what I have said already and repeat now.—It was a pig and not a sow; a white pig, with a black patch about the tail . . . or somewhat lower down."

"Well, but how did it get into your hut?"

"Into my hut? I will tell you all exactly as it took place, and show the right worshipful court and the people here

assembled that I am innocent, and that the woman Dominik is a lying gipsy, a cursed and pampered shrew."

"A lying . . . May the Most Holy Mother grant you be struck dead unshriven!" the woman ejaculated, with a deep sigh, and a glance at an image of the Blessed Virgin that hung in a corner. Then she clenched her bony fist, shook it at him, and hissed:

"O you swine-stealer! you villain, you!" and she opened her talons as though about to claw him.

Here Bartek's wife interfered, screaming:

"Would you then? would you hurt him, you jade, you witch, you tyrant of your sons?"

"Be quiet," ordered the judge.

"Hold your tongues when the judge is speaking, or I'll turn you both out of the place!" Yacek chimed in, holding up his trousers; for the braces had given way.

Silence was now restored, and the two old women, who had all but flown at each other's throats, now stood mute, though looking daggers and breathing hate.

"Speak now, Bartek, and tell us the whole truth."

"Yes, the truth, the truth itself, as clear as crystal. As if I were at confession.—It was in this wise. . . ."

"Look well into your head," his wife Magda put in, "lest you should forget anything."

"I will do so, Magda.—It was in this wise. I was walking along (it was in spring, and I was close to Boryna's clover-field, just beyond the Wolf-Hole). . . . So I walked along, saying my prayers, for night was coming on.—Now, on my way, I heard . . . was it a voice, or not? I wondered. Did it grunt, or not? . . . Behind me I looked, but saw nothing: all was still. Was it the devil after me? . . . I went on my way, shuddering with fear, and said a Hail Mary. . . . Again—a grunt! So I said to myself it was only a sow, or it might be a pig. . . . But I walked a few steps aside into the clover; and what did I see? Something following me. I stopped, it stopped. A long white thing, low on its legs; its eyes blazed like a wildcat's or a devil's. . . . I crossed myself; and having goose-flesh, mended my



pace. For I knew not what thing it could be, prowling thus by night. Also, as all men know, the Wolf's Hole is a haunted place."

"Yes, that's a truth," his wife observed; "last year Sikora was passing there at night, and something took him by the throat, threw him down, and beat him so, that he kept his bed for a fortnight."

"Hold your peace, Madga.—So on, on, on I went, with the thing still running after me—and grunting! Just then the moon shone out clear, and I saw.—Lo, it was a pig, and no devil at all! . . . I was angered; for what did the foolish thing mean by frightening me thus? So, throwing a stick at it, I make for my home, along the path between Michael's beetroots and Boryna's wheat, and then between Thomas' sown corn and Yashek's oats (him they took to the army last year, and whose wife had a baby yesterday). . . . And the pig still ran after me as a dog would run, and then going on one side, and into Dominik's potato-patch, grunted all the way. I turned off, and followed a slanting pathway across the fields: and it followed still.—I felt hot all over. My God! a strange sow!—Perhaps it was no sow! I went round nigh the crucifix, and the pig after me. . . . I leapt the ditch: it leaped too! Then I went to the mounds beyond the crucifix. . . . After me still! Then I ran by the pear-trees, and it came between my legs, and tripped me up. . . . I wondered whether it was a possessed pig! I had scarce got up, when it began to run on before me, with its tail in the air. 'Away with you, then, you pest of a beast!' I said. But it did not go from me: straight to my hut, to my very hut, did it go! It passed the fence, most honourable court! by the fence into the passage, and into the room through the open door. So help me God! Amen!"

"And so you killed and ate it, did you?" the magistrate asked, with a smile.

"Killed? Ate?—Well, what was to be done? One day went by: the pig would not go. A week passed, and there was no getting rid of it: it always returned, squealing. My wife gave it all she could to eat. Were we to let it starve?

it was as much God's creature as we were. . . . But let the most honourable court, in its wisdom, take this into account: what was I, a poor orphan, to do with it? Nobody came for the beast, we were needy people; and it ate, and ate . . . as much at least as two other pigs would have done. What then? In a month, we should have been eaten out of house and home, aye, and out of our skins too. . . . What, then, could we do? It was a case of eat or be eaten.—So we did; but only a little of it; for they heard of it in the village, and the Dominik woman complained to the Soltys,<sup>1</sup> and came with him, and took everything away."

"Everything, indeed!" interrupted the Dominik woman, angrily. "And what became of the hind quarters?"

"Ask that of Kruchek and the other dogs. We had put it into the barn for the night. Now, the dogs were on the watch, and there was a hole in the door; so they got in, and had a good feast on . . . what I am accused of stealing."

"So the sow went after you by herself, did it? Tell that story to an idiot, not to this court! You thieving black-guard! Who was it took the miller's ram? who stole his Reverence's geese? Say who?"

"Have you seen who? have you seen?" shrieked Koziol's wife, rushing forwards to use her nails. But the other continued mercilessly:

"Who plundered the organist's potato-pit? Who is it that snaps up everything missing in the village—be it gosling, or chicken, or rake or hoe?"

"You carrion, you! All you did when a lass—what your Yagna is doing now with the farm-lads—oh, no one reminds you of that now, vile trollop that you have been!"

This stung Dominikova to the very quick. "You dare to name my Yagna!" she roared furiously. "You dare! I'll knock your teeth down your throat!"

"Silence, hussies! or I shall have to drive you out!" said Yacek, to quiet them, holding his trousers up with one hand.

The witnesses were then heard.

<sup>1</sup>Soltys—the village headman.—*Translator's Note.*



Dominikova, the plaintiff, spoke first. She had taken a subdued and pious tone of voice, every now and then calling Our Lady of Chenstohova to witness. She averred that the sow was hers, that Koziol had stolen it from the meadow where it fed. She did not ask the most honourable court to punish him for that—may our Lord give him a longer time in purgatory instead!—but (and here she raised her voice to its loudest tones) for having heaped such foul outrages, and so publicly, upon Yagna and herself.

Simon, Dominikova's son, with clasped hands held under his cap, as one saying prayers in church, and with his eyes always fixed upon the judge, bore witness afterwards, in a dull plaintive voice, saying that the sow was his mother's, that it was white all over, with a black patch about the tail, and one ear torn by Lapa, Boryna's dog, which had attacked her last spring, and she had squealed so that he could hear her from the barn.

Then came the other witnesses, who all confirmed what he said, while Magda poured denials and curses through the grating, and Dominikova kept her eyes fixed on the holy image, or on Koziol, who listened attentively, with glances darted now at the witnesses, now at his wife.

The audience gave ear with intense interest, sometimes uttering a murmur, or an ironical comment, or a peal of laughter, severely suppressed by Yacek.

The case was gone into thoroughly, and only settled after the adjournment of the court to discuss the matter; during which time the people dispersed into the passages and outside the building, to get a breath of air, take refreshments, speak to the witnesses, or hold forth about their wrongs: others again, to complain of injustice with fierce invectives, as is usual on such occasions.

The adjournment over and sentence given, Boryna's case came on. Eva stood up in court, dandling her baby. With floods of tears, she related how she had come to serve at his house and worked herself off her legs, and never got a kind word, nor a corner to sleep in, no, nor enough to eat, so that she had to beg food from the neighbours, and



he had not paid her, but driven her away, and his own child too, on to the high roads.—Here she burst into bitter tears, and fell at the feet of the magistrates, screaming.

"Such, most honourable court, is the wrong done me: and this is his child!"

Boryna muttered indignantly: "She lies, like the wretch that she is."

"Lie? Why, the whole village of Lipka knows . . ."

"That you are a wanton and a drab!"

"O most honourable court! and he used to call me Yevka and names more tender still; and would bring me beads, and often and often rolls, when he came from town; and would say: 'Here you are, Yevka, here you are, my dearest! And now . . . O Jesus! O Jesus!'"

At that, she bellowed aloud.

"You gipsy trull! Why not say I brought you a feather-bed too, and cried: 'Sleep under it, Yevka, sleep!'"

There was a roar of laughter.

"What, did you not? Was there anything you did not promise me?"

"Good God!" exclaimed Boryna, in fierce bewilderment. "It's monstrous! And yet the lightning has not struck her!"

"Honourable court, it is known to the world that this thing has been: all Lipka can testify that I speak the truth. Let the witnesses speak and bear testimony!" she cried out, with a tempest of tears and ejaculations.

As a matter of fact, however, all they had to say amounted only to bits of gossip and malicious talk: so she set herself again to bring forward what proofs she had. As a last resource, she displayed her baby and exposed it to the eyes of the judges, while it kicked up its naked legs and roared lustily.

"The honourable court," she cried out, "will see with their own eyes whose it is: whose is this potato nose, whose are these grey-brown blear eyes? Boryna and he are as like as two drops of water."

But this was too much for the court's gravity; and the

audience was also convulsed with uproarious merriment, when they compared the child with Boryna. Witticisms came forth in plenty.

"There's a handsome lass for you. For all the world like a skinned dog!"

"Let the widower Boryna marry her: the boy will do for a swineherd."

"Why, she is getting as bald as a cow in spring."

"A comely girl she is! Put her as a scarecrow in a millet-field; all the birds will take fright."

"Her face is smeared all over with grease and grime."

"Because she's a thrifty soul: washes once a year to save soap!"

"No wonder; she is so busy, having to light the Jews' stoves."<sup>1</sup>

They were growing more and more caustic and biting every moment, and Eva stood dumbstruck, with the vacant look of a hunted dog in her eyes as she gazed round upon the crowd, hazily revolving something or other in her mind, when Dominikova called out aloud: "Be silent! It is a sin to revile an unfortunate like her!" Whereupon there was a sudden hush, and more than one man showed evident signs of shame.

But the accusation failed completely.

Boryna felt exceedingly relieved. Innocent as he was, he would have felt keenly both the scandal of a condemnation and the burden of an order to pay for the boy; and, as he thought, the law would often enough punish the innocent instead of the guilty: you never could tell. He knew many such cases.

He left the place directly, and, waiting till Dominikova joined him, began to consider the whole business again. He could not make out Eva's motive in thus accusing him.

"No, it is not her doing; she has not the headpiece for

<sup>1</sup> Orthodox Jews are forbidden to light fires on the Sabbath, even in winter. They therefore engage some poor woman to go round and light their stoves for them on that day.—*Translator's Note.*

that. Someone else has been egging her on.—Who can it be?"

He went with Dominikova and Simon to have a drink and a morsel to eat in a tavern; for it was past noon. Dominikova hinted that the whole business was the blacksmith his son-in-law's work; but this he could not believe.

"What would he get by that?"

"The pleasure of worrying and mortifying you, and making you a laughing-stock. That fellow would like to flay a man alive, just for the delight of the thing!"

"This spite of Eva's—I cannot understand it. I never harmed her in any way; nay, I gave his Reverence a sack of oats at her bastard's christening!"

"Why, she serves the miller; the miller is hand in glove with the blacksmith.—Don't you see?"

"I see, but cannot account for it.—Have another drink?"

"Yes, please; but you first, Matthias."

They had another drink, then a third, and finished off another pound of sausages, and half a loaf of bread; and Boryna bought a lot of rolls for Yuzka and prepared to depart.

"Come with me, Dominikova; we shall have a talk. It is tedious to be by oneself."

"All right; but I must go to church first, and say some prayers."

She was soon back, and off they started.

The sun was drawing westward by the time they reached the forest.

Now and then they said a few words to each other, but only out of courtesy: it would never do for them to sit moping together. But they only talked just enough not to doze, and to "keep their tongues wet," as the saying goes.

Boryna whipped up the filly, which now, all in a lather, and tired and overheated, was going too slowly. He would whistle now and then, and again relapse into silence, ruminating and pondering over something in his mind, and calculating things: not infrequently stealing a look at the old



woman, with that dried hard face, set and furrowed, and in hue like bleached wax. Her toothless jaws moved a little, as if she were praying silently. Sometimes she would draw the red apron she had tied round her neck, further over her brow; for the sun shone right into her face. She sat motionless, save for the gleaming of her grey-brown eyes.

"Have you dug all your potatoes?" he asked at length.

"We have. And a pretty good crop it is."

"All the easier for you to keep a pig."

"I am fattening one; it will come in handy during the carnival."

"Surely, surely.—They say that Valek, Rafal's son, has sent messengers to you with vodka."

"Yes, and others have done the same; but they have lost their money. No, my Yagna is not for the likes of them."

Raising her head, she looked him straight in the eyes, like a hawk. But Boryna, a man of mature years, was not confused as a youth might have been. He met her glance with calm and unfathomable serenity. For a considerable time neither spoke; each seemed vying in taciturnity with the other.

It was not fitting for Boryna to make the first advances. How could he—he, already past middle age, one of the first men in Lipka—blurt out to her that he had taken a fancy to her Yagna? Nevertheless, being of a hot temperament, he felt his choler rise within him, thus forced to parley and beat about the bush.

Dominikova saw he was annoyed, and knew why; but she would not help him out by so much as one word, and continued to eye him in silence. At last, however, in order to say something, she remarked:

"You look as hot as though it were harvest-time."

"Because I am."

And indeed it was very hot. The forest was all round them; its mighty barrier let no breath of air pass, and the sun burned so fiercely that the tree-tops, scorched with its

rays, were drooping over the road, while a faint fungus-like odour, pungent in the nostrils, came up from the drying pools and the dry oak-leaves on the ground.

"Do you know," said the old woman, "I, and others too, have often wondered why such a man as you, a man of such high repute amongst us, so wealthy and so much more able than most men—has no ambition to occupy some official position?"

"You are right to say I am without ambition. What would such a post profit me? I was Soltys here for three years: it cost me a pretty sum. I lost so much by it that my wife was angry with me."

"She was quite right. To be an official always ought to mean both honour and profit."

"Thank you! A great honour it is, surely, to have to bow to the constables, and lout low to every clerk and every underling at court. . . . And if taxes are unpaid, or a bridge is out of order, or if a dog hit by a cart-shaft goes mad, who is to blame? Why, the Soltys always! And the profit! How many a fowl and goose and score of eggs have I not had to send to the clerks and the district officials!"

"You say true; but then Peter the Voyt here has no grounds of complaint. He has purchased some land, and built a barn too."

"Yes; but when he is Voyt no longer, what will he do?"

"Then you think that . . ."

"Oh, I have my eyes open, and can see a thing or two."

"He is most conceited, and at sixes and sevens with the priest."

"And if he gets on at all, it is his wife's doing: she is the real Voyt, and holds all the cards in her hands."

There was silence again for the space of a long pater noster.

"Tell me," she said at last, very deliberately, "are you not going to send anyone messengers with vodka?"

"Ah, the desire of women is no longer with me: I am an old man."

"Do not speak vain words. A man is old when he can



go about no more, nor lift a spoon to his mouth by himself, nor sit elsewhere but by the stove. Why, I have seen you shouldering a sackful of rye!"

"Granted that I am yet hale: but who would care to have me?"

"That you cannot know until you have tried."

"Besides, my children are grown up, and I cannot take the first lass that comes."

"Make a deed of gift, and the very best of them will not hold back."

"A deed of gift! To get an acre of land, a girl would take a beggar from the church porch."

"What of men? They wouldn't take a girl with a dowry, would they?"

He made no reply, but whipped the filly to a gallop.

Another silence ensued, broken only when they were out of the forest and upon the poplar-lined road; when Boryna suddenly exclaimed:

"To the devil with the world as it goes on now! For everything, nay, even for a good word, you must pay! It is so bad that worse cannot be. Even children rise up against their parents; there is nowhere any obedience, and everyone would devour everyone else! The dogs!"

"They are fools, not remembering that we shall all lie one day together in consecrated ground."

"One has scarce begun to be a man, when he flies in his father's face, loudly demanding a portion of his land; and the young only scoff at the old. Scoundrels, for whom their own village is a hole, who despise all ancient rules, and who—some of them—are even ashamed of their peasant's dress!"

"All because they have not the fear of God."

"Because or not because of that, things are wrong."

"And will surely not mend."

"They must! But who can compel men to do right?"

"God's judgments! For behold, That Day will come, and He will punish them!"

"Yes, but before That Day, how many shall be lost!"

"Times are so bad, that a plague were better."



"Times are bad, but men are so, too. What of the blacksmith? And of the Voyt? They quarrel with our priest, they make people rebel; they seduce them and are believed by the purblind. That blacksmith, though my son-in-law, is yet as poison to me."

They continued to complain in chorus of the world's wickedness, as they looked through the poplars towards the village they were nearing.

In the distance, there could be seen, outside the churchyard, a row of women bending down, indistinctly visible through a thin haze round them, and the dull monotonous thudding sound of clattering swingles came to them, borne on the breeze from the low-lying meadows.

"Just the weather for scutching flax. I shall get down to speak to them, for Yagna is there too."

"I'll drive you to her; it will make no difference to me."

"How very kind you are to-day, Matthias!" she said with a sly smile.

They turned off from the poplar road to the by-way that led over the fields to the churchyard. There, outside the low wall of grey stone which surrounded it, in the shadow of some birches and maples, and of a few crosses, too, which leaned over the wall, hard on twenty women were very busily scutching and beating the dry flax: a mist of threads hung over them in the air, and a few filaments had caught on to the yellow birch-leaves, or hung suspended from the dark-hued arms of the crosses. Further down, fires had been kindled in pits, over and across which poles were laid, and upon them damp flax was drying.

The swingles were hard at work, and all the womenfolk bent and rose with quick short jerks up and down: now and then one or another stood up, beat a wisp of flax free from remnants of woody matter, and, rolling it up, tossed it on to a piece of linen spread out in front of her.

The sun, being at present over the forest, shone directly in their faces, but they did not mind: work and laughter and merry talk never ceased for an instant.

"God bless your work!" cried Boryna to Yagna, who was

swinging the flax with all her might. She had nothing on but her white smock, a red petticoat, and an apron tied over her head against the dust.

"Bless you for the wish!" she returned blithely, raising her dark-blue eyes to his, while a smile lit up her handsome sunburnt face.

"Is it quite dry, dear?" her mother asked, fingering the scutched flax.

"Dry as a peppercorn; quite brittle."

And again she eyed the old man with a smile that made him tingle all over. He smacked his whip and drove away, looking back at her again and again, though she was not to be seen any more; for his mind's eye saw her still.

"A girl as graceful as a hind!" he muttered. "Aye, even so!"

## CHAPTER IV

SUNDAY had come round: a bright September Sunday, with plenty of gossamers and sunshine in the air.

All Boryna's livestock was feeding in the stubble beyond the barn; and Kuba, watching heedfully over them in the shadow of a tall and dome-like cornstack, was at the same time teaching Vitek his prayers.

"Now attend to what I am telling you," he said solemnly; "these are holy words."

"I'm attending, Kuba, I'm attending."

"Then why are you looking at those orchards?"

"I see the Klembas have got some apples on their trees still."

"Oh! and you'd like to eat them? Did you plant them?—Come, say the Creed again."

"You did not hatch the partridges, either; yet you have taken the whole brood."

"Silly lad! the apples are Klemba's, but partridges belong to our Lord. Do you see?"

"But the field where you took them belongs to the Squire."

"And the field, too, is the Lord's. You're too clever by half.—Now say the Creed."

He did so, but in haste, for it hurt him to stay on his knees so long.

"I think that filly is going into Michael's clover!" he exclaimed, preparing to run after her.

"Don't trouble about her, but say your prayers."

He went through them at last, but had to rest on his heels, and turned and twisted in every direction. A band of sparrows having settled on a tree close by, he shied a clod of earth at them, and at once beat his breast in contrition.



"Ah, what about the Offering at the end? Swallowed like an overripe pear, I suppose?"

He said the Offering, and immediately started up to wake Lapa and play with it.

"The calf-like witling! Always scampering about!"

Are you going to take the birds to his Reverence?"

"Yes, I am."

"They would be nice, if roasted here. . . ."

"You have potatoes to roast. What would you more?"

"See, they are going to church already!" cried Vitek, glancing through the hedge and the orchard-trees at the red aprons that went twinkling along the road.

It was pretty warm, and all the doors and windows of the huts had been thrown wide open. Here and there, in front of the huts, some were still washing their faces, or combing or plaiting their hair, or beating their Sunday garments, which had suffered from a week's stay in the trunks; but others had already started, in raiment of the hues of vermilion poppies, or saffron-tinted dahlias, or nasturtium flowers. Women and girls, in bright array, farm-hands, little children, grave husbandmen, in long white capotes that reminded you of huge sheaves of rye, were all slowly wending their way to church along the roads that led to the pond, which reflected the sunbeams like a golden trencher.

And joyfully the big bells boomed, and told of Sunday, and rest, and prayer.

Kuba had meant to wait till they rang no longer, but his patience gave way, so, putting the partridges under his capote, he said:

"Vitek! as soon as they have done ringing, drive the cattle to the byre, and then come to church."

He then started off—as fast as he could, for he was very lame—along the road, bordered with orchards, and so strewn with yellow linden leaves, that he seemed to be walking over a carpet of motley fallow hue.

The priest's dwelling stood over against the church, at the bottom of a large garden, in which there were trees still laden with green pears or ruddy apples. All over the porch

there grew a wild vine, the leaves of which were now of a rich crimson. Kuba stopped outside, embarrassed, and looking timidly in at the window and the passage. He durst not go in, and stayed by a large flower-bed, gay with roses, gilly-flowers, and asters, whose fragrance was very sweet. From the roof, green with moss, a flock of white doves flew down to settle on the porch.

The priest was walking in his garden, saying his Office; but time and again he would shake an apple or a pear-tree. The fruit fell in a sounding shower, and he gathered them up in the skirts of his soutane.

Kuba came up to him, and humbly embraced his knees.

"What is it you say?—Ah, Kuba, Boryna's man."

"Yes. I have brought your Reverence a few partridges."

"Thanks for your gift. Come this way."

Kuba accordingly entered the passage, but stopped at the threshold of the room. He feared to go in, and would only look through the open door at the various pictures that hung against the walls. He crossed himself, and breathed a devout sigh, so dazzled by the splendour he saw, that the tears started to his eyes, and he felt like saying prayers. Only he was afraid to kneel down upon the polished slippery floor, lest he should soil it.

Presently the priest came out of the room, saying, as he handed him a *zloty*:

"God reward you, Kuba; you are a good man and a godly one, who never miss church on Sundays."

Kuba again embraced the priest's knees, so overwhelmed with bliss that he never knew how he got out and on to the road.

"What, so much money for so few birds! How I love his Reverence!" he whispered, looking over the coins given him. He had more than once brought him birds, or a leveret, or mushrooms; but never had he received so much: at most, ten kopeks and a kind word. And now! O sweet Lord! a whole *zloty*!—And he had called Kuba into his room besides, and said such gentle words! Lord, Lord!

"None but the priest has regard for poor people, no one



else!—May God and the Blessed Virgin of Chenstohova grant him health!—Yes, a good man you are, and a kind one!—All the village, farm-hands and owners, only give me nicknames—call me Cripple, Good-for-Nothing, and Hanger-on. No one else speaks to me with the least kindness or compassion . . . no one cares for me, but the horses and the dogs. And yet I am of an honest family: no foundling, but a farmer's son."

He raised his head higher at the thought, straightened himself, and looked almost defiantly on those about him going to the churchyard, and on the horses which stood harnessed to the carts outside the enclosure. He donned his cap, and covered his head of tangled hair, and slowly, with dignified mien, made for the church; thrusting his hands into his girdle, as a farmer would have done, though the dust flew up as he dragged his lame leg after him.

No. This day he would not, as his wont was, stay in the entrance. He pushed boldly through the crowd, even close to the High Altar railings, where only the husbandmen used to stand, where his master was standing, and the Voyt himself, and the men who carried the canopy over his Reverence in the procession, and those who, taper in hand, surrounded the altar at the Elevation!

They regarded him with amazement and indignation. More than once he heard taunts and words of upbraiding, and was scowled at, as one scowls at a dog that goes where it is not wanted. But to-day he did not mind. The money was tight in his clenched fist; his mind, full of sweet and gentle feelings. He had a sensation as if he had but now been shriven; nay, he felt even better.

Divine Service began. He knelt down close to the Communion Table, and sang along with the others, his eyes piously fixed upon the altar, whereon was seen the image of God the Father: a hoary magnate, stern-looking—just like the Squire of Djasgova Vola. In the centre, Our Lady of Chenstohova, in gilt raiment, looked down upon him.

On every side, gold shone bright, tapers gleamed, and nosegays of red flowers were flaming. From the walls, from



the stained-glass windows, austere saintly visages, surrounded with aureoles, bent above him; streams of gold, purple, and violet came down, flooding his face and head with rainbow tints, and he felt as when he plunged into the pond at sundown, when its waters reflected the sky. Dissolved into ecstasies with the joy of the beauty before him, he was too much awed to move, and knelt motionless, gazing at the sweet dark maternal face of the Virgin of Chenstohova, and with parched lips said prayer after prayer, and sang with such force and fervour, welling up from the inmost depths of his enraptured heart, that his husky tuneless voice was heard high above the others.

"Kuba! you are bleating like the Jew's goat!" someone whispered at his elbow.

"For the Lord Jesus and His Virgin Mother!" he replied.

The priest had now gone up to the pulpit. All present lifted their heads to gaze on that white-surpliced figure, which, bending forward over the people, read the Gospel of that Sunday to them. This ended, the sermon began: long, but so powerful that many wept tears, and many heads were bowed down in remorse. Kuba's looks were fixed on him, as on some holy image: he marvelled at the thought that this was the very man who had just talked with him, and given him a *zloty*. For now he was transfigured into an archangel in a chariot of fiery light. His face turned pale and his eyes flashed, as he raised his voice to denounce the sins of his people: greed and drunkenness, lust and spite, disrespect for the aged, and ungodly behaviour. And his voice resounded, calling upon them, and entreating and beseeching them to repent; until Kuba, dismayed at the thought of all these sins, and the pity and the sorrow of them, wept aloud, and all the congregation after him—not women only, but burly husbandmen as well—and the whole place was filled with the sounds of sobs. Then, when the priest, concluding with an Act of Contrition, turned towards the altar, and went down on his knees, a cry ran through the building; all the people fell prostrate on the pavement, like a forest blown down by a whirlwind; and a cloud of

dust rose over the multitude that lay thus, tearful and lamenting, heart-broken and contrite, imploring the mercy of God.

Then silence again prevailed—the silence of prayer and of heartfelt communing with God: for now High Mass had begun. The organ poured forth low muffled sounds of awe and adoration; and Kuba's soul was full, even to bursting, of love and ecstatic bliss.

Suddenly the accents of the priest were audible from the altar, floating above the bowed heads of the multitude—strange thrilling sounds, and holy, holy words; and then the bells thundered in a rapid volley, and the incense rose in odoriferous pillars, wrapping the worshippers in a sweet-smelling mist. Oh, then Kuba was seized with such blissful rapture that he could only sigh, and stretch his arms wide, and beat his breast, swooning almost with the joy of his own nothingness!

"O Jesus! Jesus whom I love!" he murmured, in dazed annihilation. But he held the *zloty* tight in his clenched fist: for now the Elevation was over, and Ambrose was now coming round with the plate, clinking the coins thereon to tell of the collection for the church tapers. Kuba rose, threw his *zloty* on to the plate, and slowly took back from it a few kopeks—just as he had seen the farmers doing many a time. And with infinite delight, he heard Ambrose say: "May God reward you!"

Presently they brought the tapers round, for the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, and there was to be a procession round the church afterwards. Kuba put forth his hand, having a great mind for a larger one: but his eye met the cold reproving glance of Dominikova, who was standing near him, along with Yagna: so he chose a small taper. This he lit immediately; for the priest was holding the Monstrance in his hands, and turning towards the people. Intoning the hymn, the Celebrant slowly descended the altar-steps and into the lane at once formed for him—a lane of singers, of flickering lights, and gaudy colours, and droning voices. The procession began to move, the organ



thundered mightily, the bells joined in with clamorous uproar, and the congregation took up the chant with voices raised in the grand unison of faith. In front of the crowd, and of the twinkling sinuous lines of tapers moving on, there gleamed a silver crucifix; following this came the holy images, dimly seen through a haze of cambric, and surrounded with flowers and lace and ornaments of tinsel. The procession arrived at the great church door, through which the sun irradiated the clouds of incense that it pierced; and as the banners stooped to pass, the breezes made them float and flutter and flap, like the wings of some great green and purple birds.

Round the church the procession went, Kuba sheltering his taper well with one hand, as he doggedly limped on, close to the priest, over whom Boryna, the blacksmith, the Voyt, and Thomas Klemba bore a red canopy. Under this, the golden-rayed Monstrance shot forth its beams, and was so directly turned to the sun that you could see it shine through the semi-transparency of the Sacred Host at the centre.

He was so absorbed that he more than once stumbled or trod upon someone's foot.

"Clumsy one, take heed!"

"You lame scarecrow, you!"

But he did not hear these invectives. Grandly the chants resounded, rising like billows of melody that dashed and broke around that pale white sun within the Monstrance. The throats of bronze overhead unceasingly rolled out their sonorous notes into the air, till the maples and the linden-trees shook their boughs, and now and then some reddish leaf flew down from their tops, like a frightened bird. And high, very high above them, over the church steeple and the drooping trees, a flock of startled doves was wheeling.

. . . . .

The service was over, and they all poured into the cemetery round the church, Kuba amongst the rest.

Though he knew there would be a feast that day at the



farm-house, he was in no hurry, but stayed to talk with his acquaintances, and gradually drew near his masters, where Antek and his wife were standing in conversation with others, as is the custom after High Mass.

Another group, that had met in the road outside the lychgate, had for leader the blacksmith: a stalwart fellow, dressed town-fashion from head to foot, in a black capote (spotted with drops of wax on the back!), and a dark-blue cap; he wore his trousers over his boots, and a silver chain adorned his waistcoat. His face was ruddy, his hair curly, his moustache red, his talk loud. And his laugh too: his was the smartest wit in all the village, and when he made a butt of anyone—well, that man's lot was not happy. Boryna watched him and listened. He could make out that the blacksmith spared not even his own people. Was he, then, likely to spare a father-in-law, with whom he was at odds for his wife's dowry? But Boryna could not hear much: Dominikova, just leaving church with Yagna, now passed in front of him. They did not get on fast, for they stopped in the churchyard to greet or converse with many people. He heard a few words about the priest, said by Dominikova in low and pious tones; meanwhile Yagna looked about her at the people. Having the advantage of a stature as tall as the tallest there, she was also looked at by many a farm-hand, who smoked cigarettes and grinned at her from outside the lychgate. She was indeed a fine woman, and well dressed, and with such a bearing that many a country gentleman's daughter could scarce vie with her.

The girls and married women who passed by all gazed on her, either in envy or simply with the desire of feasting their eyes on her striped skirt of rich stuff and ever-changing rainbow tints; her black highlows, laced up with red shoe-strings to where the dainty white stockings appeared; her corset of cherry-coloured velvet, gold-embroidered, flaming, dazzling; and the strings of amber and coral beads she wore round her full white throat, whence a bunch of particoloured ribbons streamed down her back.

But Yagna took no note of envious looks. Her deep-blue eyes strayed to and fro, till they met Antek's, fixed upon her; then she flushed crimson, and plucked at her mother's sleeve to go home.

"Wait a little, Yagna!" the latter called after her, greeting Boryna.

She could hardly get away, for the farm-hands were now crowding about her, with salutations and jests—the latter addressed to Kuba, and not without a sharp tang. For Kuba was following her, and staring as at some *fatale* picture. With a gesture of contempt, he turned to limp home; his masters were going that way, and he had to see to the horses.

"Yes, she's a picture!" he blurted out, when he had seated himself in the porch.

Yuzka was just then bringing the dinner in. "Who's a picture?" she asked.

He cast his eyes down, abashed and afraid lest he should have betrayed himself. But the dinner was long and abundant; so he soon forgot all about that.

They all ate leisurely, with grave miens and in silence, until the edge of their appetite was blunted, and they could now talk and enjoy their meal with more dainty zest.

Yuzka was that day on duty as housewife, and saw to it that the platters should be always properly supplied, ever and anon bringing more food, lest the bottom of any dish perchance be seen.

The porch where they were dining was obviously the best place in such pleasant weather. Lapa ran to and fro, whining for food, and even rising up to look into the dishes, till someone threw him a bone. He carried it off, and barked for joy when his masters called him by name, and jumped at the sparrows, perched upon the hedge in expectation of crumbs to eat.

Passers-by merrily wished them joy: to which good wishes they all would answer with thanks in chorus.

"I hear you have been taking some birds to his Reverence," Boryna said.



"Yes, I have." And, setting down his spoon, Kuba told how the priest had invited him into the room, and what a number of big books he had seen there.

"When has he time to read them all?" Yuzka wondered.

"When? Why, of an evening. He walks about the room, and drinks tea, and is continually reading."

"Books of piety they must all be," Kuba added.

"What else should they be? Not spelling-books, surely!"

"He reads the paper the village factor brings him daily," Hanka added. And her husband remarked:

"Yes, for by the papers we know what's done all the world over."

"The smith takes a paper in, and the miller too."

"A paper fit for the smith, no doubt," remarked Boryna, with a sneer.

"As it happens, the same paper that his Reverence takes in," was Antek's hot retort.

"You know, then? Have you read it?"

"Yes, I have . . . more than once."

"You'll get none the wiser for his counsels."

"And whom do you hold wise? One with seventeen acres, or eight head of cattle, perhaps?"

"Hold your tongue before I lose my temper! Always picking quarrels with me!—You're too full of bread—*my* bread!"

"Aye, so full that like a fishbone it sticks in my throat!"

"Then seek better bread. Hanka's three acres will give you rolls!"

"Potatoes only; but these none will grudge me."

"I grudge you nothing."

"No? I work like an ox, nor ever get a kind word."

"Elsewhere life is easier, and food given free!"

"Elsewhere it is better, surely."

"Then go and try it!"

"What, empty-handed? Not I!"

"I'll give you a staff, to keep the dogs away."

"Father!" Antek shouted, starting to his feet, but falling back at once, for Hanka caught him round the waist. The



old man glared at him fiercely: then, crossing himself as if dinner were over, he went out and into his room, saying in a hard voice:

"D'ye think I'll let myself be pensioned off by you? Never!"

All rose at once and left the porch, except Antek, who stayed alone there, pondering. Kuba took the horses to the clover beyond the barn, and lay down to sleep beside a cornstack. But he could not; the full meal lay heavy on his chest. Moreover, it now occurred to him that if he had a gun he could kill birds enough—and, it might be, a leveret or two into the bargain—to offer every Sunday to his Reverence.

The smith could forge him a gun. He had made one for the keeper; and this, when let off in the woods, was plainly heard in the village!

"A first-rate workman!—But then he wants five roubles to make one!" He fell into a brown study.

"Where am I to get them from? Winter is at hand: I must buy me a sheepskin coat. My boots, too, will not last beyond Yuletide.—Well, there are due me ten roubles, and two bits of clothing—trousers and a shirt. A sheepskin coat, short though it may be, will come to five roubles. Boots, three more. I must get a cap; and a rouble will have to go besides, for his Reverence to say a mass for my departed. So then nothing at all will be left!"—He was disappointed, fumbled in his pockets for a little tobacco that might be left, and so came upon the ready money he had previously forgotten.

"Ah! here I have some cash!"—He no longer cared to sleep. From the tavern there came a far-off sound of music, an echo of shouts, softened by the distance.

"There they are—dancing, and drinking vodka, and smoking too!" he sighed; and, lying down again on his stomach, he glanced over at the hobbled horses, that had gathered together and were nibbling at each other's necks. Then he decided that in the evening he too would go to the

tavern, purchase some tobacco, and just have a look at the dancers.

From time to time, he would glance at his money, then at the sun, which was that day going down with exceeding sluggishness, as if it also needed its Sunday rest. His longing for the tavern was now so great that he could hardly bear it; but he refrained from going just then, and only turned over on his side, and groaned within himself. Antek and Hanka had come out from behind the barn, and were walking along the dividing pathway between the fields.

Antek went foremost; Hanka, leading her little boy by the hand, came after. At times, as they walked on slowly, they spoke a few words. Then Antek would bend down, and stroke the blades that were sprouting forth.

"It is growing up.—As thick as the bristles of a brush," he muttered, casting his eyes over those acres, sown by himself and for himself: the wages of work done for his father.

"Thick, yes: but Father's corn is better still. It grows up like a forest," Hanka said, casting a look on the neighbouring cornfields.

"The land might be better manured, had we but three cows."

"And a horse of our own. . . ."

"Aye, then we might raise some fowls or things for market. As it is, what can we do? Father counts every husk of chaff, and thinks a lot of a potato-peeling."

"And taunts us with every morsel he gives!"

They could speak no more. Their hearts were too full of gall and bitterness, and the angry gnawing pain of revolt.

After a time: "Eight acres or thereabouts would be our share, if . . ." he observed, absently.

"No more. There's Yuzka, and the smith's wife, and Gregory and ourselves," she counted.

"If we paid money down to the smith, and kept the hut, and sixteen acres with it?"

"But have you the money to pay?" she cried, over-



whelmed with a sense of helplessness; and the tears started to her eyes, as she gazed at her father-in-law's fields—that land, precious as pure gold, whereon, aye, on every inch of it, wheat and rye and barley and beets might be grown.

"Don't cry, you silly thing; at any rate, we shall have eight acres of our own one day."

"Oh, if we had but half as many, with the hut and the cabbagepatch!" She pointed to the long stretch of ground, bluish-green with heads of cabbages; and they both bent their steps that way. At its edge they sat down under a bush; Hanka suckled the child, which had begun to cry for food, while Antek rolled a cigarette, lit it, puffed, and scowled.

He said not a word to his wife of the pain that was devouring him, and burned within his heart like coals of fire. For neither could he have told her, nor she have understood him: as is usual with women, who have no sort of initiative, who neither reflect nor catch the sense of things, but who live—so to say—only as the shadows which men throw.

"But," Hanka went on to say, "Father has ready money by him, has he not?"

"That he has!"

"Why, he brought Yuzka a coral necklace worth as much as a cow; and he is always sending money to Gregory through the Voyt."

Antek assented, but his mind was wandering elsewhere.

"It is wronging us all!—And the clothes your mother left! he has them locked up, nor so much as lets them see the light: skirts and kerchiefs, caps and beads. . . ." She went on thus a long time, telling of all these things, and of wrongs done, and grievances, and hopes: but Antek remained obstinately silent. At last, out of patience, she shook him by the shoulder:

"Are you awake?"

"Aye, and listening. Talk away, it will do you good. And when you have done, say so."

Hanka, who was naturally inclined to weep, and had many a cause for sadness besides, here burst into tears;



he spoke to her, she cried, as to a girl he scorned: he cared neither for her nor for her child.

At this, Antek rose to his feet, and replied contemptuously:

"Lift up your voice: these"—with a toss of his head towards some crows flying past them—"these will hear and take pity on you!" and, settling his cap on his head, he made for the village with great strides.

"Antek! Antek!" she called after him, in sorrow; but he did not even turn his head.

With a very heavy heart, she wrapped up the baby, and made for home.—So he would not let her talk to him about things, or complain of anything. Oh, he was very friendly, Antek, he was indeed! It was always, Work, work, work; and, See to this, and to that, and to the other thing; and, Stay at home! Nothing else! No consideration, no compassion, no fellowship at all!—Other women enjoyed themselves in the tavern, or went to a wedding.—But Antek! She knew not what to make of him. Sometimes he was so gentle, that gentler could not be; but again, and for weeks together, he would scarce utter a word to her, or give her a glance: it was think, think, think—all the time. True, he had cause enough. . . . Why should not his father make over the land to him now? . . . It was high time for the old man to retire and let them keep him. . . . If he did, she would take as much care of him as she would of her own father. . . .

She would willingly have talked to Kuba; but he leaned back against the cornstack, pretending to sleep, though the sun was shining straight into his eyes. And no sooner had she disappeared round the corner of the barn than he got up, brushed the straw from his clothes, and slowly took his way by the orchards to the tavern.

The tavern stood at the farther end of the village, beyond the priest's house, at the beginning of the poplar road.

There were not many people there yet. The music was heard at intervals, but no one had begun to dance. The lads and lasses preferred to romp in the orchard, or to stand

about the house, or close to the walls, where plenty of women and girls were sitting on piles of deal logs, still fresh and yellow from the forest. The biggest room, with its dingy smoke-tinged rafters, was all but empty; the tiny window-panes, grey with dust, let so little pass of the red glow of the approaching sundown, that scarcely any got through to fall on the worn uneven floor; and in the nooks and corners the dusk was very deep.

Only Ambrose was there, with a member of the village Confraternity; they stood, bottle in hand, chatting together close to the window, and frequently drinking to each other's health.

Yagustynka was at the tavern, too, making herself unpleasant to everyone, and uncompromisingly angry with the whole world, because her children had treated her ill, and she had in her old age to seek work away from them. No one, however, answered her invectives; so she made for the small dark chamber, where the smith was sitting together with Antek and several other younger men.

A lamp swung from the murky beams, shedding a dim yellowish light on heads shaggy with luxuriant blond hair. The men sat in a circle, with their elbows on the table. All eyes were fixed on the blacksmith, who, flushed and bending forward, now stretched out his arms, now banged the table with his fists; but he spoke, nevertheless, in subdued tones.

Outside, the bass-voils were grumbling, like the humming flight of a bumble-bee that has got into a room. The violin would suddenly shed forth strong loud notes, as of a bird calling its mate; or the cymbal set up a drumming quavering din: and then all would again be quiet.

Kuba had made straight for the bar, behind which Yankel, the Jewish tavern-keeper, was sitting, in his skull-cap and shirt-sleeves (for the weather was warm), stroking his grey beard, swaying to and fro, and reading out of a book he held close to his eyes.

Kuba, taking thought, came forward step by step, counted his money over, scratched his head, and then stood still,

till Yankel noticed him, and without interruption in his prayers and swaying motions, jingled the glasses once or twice.

"One-eighth of a litre—but no water in it!" was his order at last.

Yankel silently held his left hand out for the money, and throwing the verdigris-eaten coins into a tray, inquired:

"In a glass?"

"Not in a boot, I suppose!" Kuba returned. Withdrawing to the very end of the bar, he drank off the first glass, spat on the ground, and looked round the room; the second dispatched, he held the flask up to the light, saw it empty, and pounded on the bar with it.

"Another!—And a packet of tobacco!" he ordered; more boldly now, for the vodka was filling him with pleasant warmth, and a peculiar sense of confidence.

"Got your wages to-day, Kuba?"

"Not likely. Is it New Year's Day?"

"Have a little rum?"

"No. I don't care." He counted his money, and sorrowfully glanced at the rum-bottle.

"But I'll trust you; don't I know Kuba?"

"I dare not.—'Who purchases on trust will soon not have a crust,'" he answered, dryly.

Nevertheless, Yankel left the rum-bottle close at his elbow. He wanted not to take it, and meant to go out; but the rum had such a scent that he at last gave way, and took a long draught on the impulse of the moment.

"This money, did you earn it in the forest?" Yankel inquired, with patient importunity.

"Caught birds in a net; gave six to his Reverence. He gave me a *zloty*."

"A *zloty* for six, did he? Why, I would have given you five kopeks for each of them.

"But—but——" cried Kuba, astounded, "are partridges kosher?"

"Never mind about that; only bring me lots of them, and



for every one you bring, you will get five kopeks of ready money. And the rum you have drunk will be thrown into the bargain. Is it well?"

"What, Yankel! Five kopeks for each?"

"My word is no idle wind. For those six partridges, Kuba, you would have got, not two-eighths of a litre of vodka, but four! together with rum, and a herring, and a roll, and a packet of tobacco. Do you understand?"

"I do. Half a litre, and a herring, and . . . I am not a fool, I can make it all out.—Quite true.—Half a litre, and rum, and tobacco, and rolls, and one entire herring. . . ." He was by this time somewhat fuddled by the fumes of the vodka.

"Will you bring the birds to me, Kuba?"

"Half a litre, and a herring, and . . . Yes, I will.—You see, had I but a gun," he continued, his brain now a little clearer; but then he fell to counting again. "A sheepskin, now, will come to five roubles . . . and boots, too, I need . . . three roubles. No, I can't manage it: the smith wants five for a gun—as much from me as from Rafal.—No!" He was thinking out loud.

Yankel made a swift calculation with a bit of chalk, and then whispered low in his ear:

"Could you shoot a doe?"

"With my fists—how? With a gun I could."

"Can you shoot then—properly?"

"You're a Jew, Yankel, so you don't know this: but everybody here knows I went along with the masters in the last insurrection; that's how I got shot in the leg. Oh, yes, yes, I can shoot!"

"I'll get you a gun and powder, and whatever you may want. Only, what you shoot you are to bring to me, Kuba! For a doe, you shall have a whole rouble. You hear me? a whole rouble! For the powder, you will pay fifteen kopeks, that I shall deduct for every doe shot. Then, for the wear and tear of the gun, I shall want half a bushel of oats."

"A rouble for a doe? and fifteen kopeks for the pow-

der? . . . A whole rouble? How do you make that out?"

Yankel again went over every particular. Kuba only understood one point.

"Take oats out of the horses' mouths?" he said. "That I'm not going to do."

"Why should you? Boryna has oats . . . not only in the mangers."

"But—but that would be like . . ." He stared at Yankel, and tried to make things out.

"They all do that! Did you never wonder where the farm-hands got all their money from? How else are they to have their tobacco, and their nip of vodka, and their dance of Sundays?"

"How? what? you scurvy fellow! Am I a thief, say?" he suddenly thundered out, striking on the table with his fist, so that the glasses rang.

"Ah! Kuba, you'll fly out at me, will you? Then pay your score and go to the devil!"

But he neither paid nor left. He was penniless, and in debt to the Jews besides. So he only drooped heavily over the bar, in an attempt to make out the reckoning. And Yankel, growing kind, poured him out some more rum—pure this time—and said not a word.

More and more people had by now thronged into the tavern, for the twilight had deepened, and the lamps were lit. The music sounded to a quicker measure; the noise waxed loud; the folk formed groups around the bar, or along the walls, or in the centre of the room. They talked, gossiped, grumbled; and some drank one to another. But as a rule this was at rare intervals. For how could they do otherwise? They had not come to carouse, but only—well, so: to meet in a neighbourly way, and confabulate, and learn what there was to be learned. It was Sunday, and there was surely no sin in indulging one's curiosity a little, and drinking a few glasses here and there with one's acquaintances: provided always it was done seemingly, without offending God. His Reverence himself did not forbid that. Why, even beasts of burden, for example,



were glad and required to rest after labour! So the elderly husbandmen sat at the table, and certain of the women, too, in red petticoats and red kerchiefs, each looking like a hollyhock in bloom. And as all talked at once, the murmur of voices filled the whole place, like the rustling of a great wood; and the trampling of feet was as the strokes of flails beating the wheat upon the threshing-floor: while the fiddle sang out with a merry tune:

*"Who will—who will after me?"* they cried, and the bass-voles growled the reply:

*"All must follow—follow thee!"* Meanwhile the cymbal, fluttering about with a sound as of laughter, made a joyful noise with its jingling little bells.

There were not many dancers; but these stamped with such lusty goodwill that the floor creaked, the table rocked, the bottles clinked one against the other now and then, or even a glass would be knocked over.

But it was no grand affair after all: the day was one of no special solemnity, such as a wedding or a betrothal in church. They merely danced to have a little fun and make their backs and their legs straighter from the week's work. Only, there were the lads who were to be taken into the army towards the end of autumn: those drank deep for very grief. And no wonder, having so soon to go amongst strangers, and into a foreign land.

Of these, the Voyt's young brother was the noisiest; and after him, Martin Byalek, Thomas Sikora, Paul Boryna (a first cousin of Antek who had also come at twilight to the tavern: only that day he did not dance, but sat in the smaller room with the smith and his companions), and lastly Franek from the mill, a short, thick-set, curly-headed young man: the greatest talker of them all, a rakish youngster much given to joking, and so excessively fond of girls that his face was seldom without a bruise or a scratch. This evening he was quite tipsy to start with, and stood near the bar now, along with fat Magda (from the organist's house), who was six months gone with child.



The priest had given him public reproof from the pulpit, and urged him to marry her. But Franek would not obey, because he had to go to the army in autumn, and what should he do with a wife there?

Magda now drew him into a corner, and was saying something in a tearful voice; but he answered as ever:

"You're a fool. Did I entice you, say? I'll pay for the christening, and give you a rouble or so—as much as I choose to give." He was stupefied with drink, and pushed her away so roughly that she sank down on the ground near Kuba, who was sleeping close to the stove, his head in the ashes. Then Kranek went off to drink again with Ambrose and the farmers, who were all willing to pay for him, to get their corn ground sooner.

"Have a drink, Franek, and pray get my stuff ground quick: my wife is worrying me—says she hasn't enough flour to make any more dumplings."

"Ah! and mine is continually grumbling, because we have no groats."

"And mine must have oatmeal for the pig we are fattening."

Franek drank, promised everything, and bragged very loud about what he could do. It was by his orders, he said, that everything was done at the mill. The miller had to do his will . . . and if not! well, he, Franek, knew of means to cause vermin to breed in the flour-bins—to make the stream run dry—to kill the fishes till the pond should stink—and rot the flour, so that it would be good for nothing in the world. . . .

"And I, if you did that to me, would pluck the wool off your curly ram's head!" cried a voice: it was Yagustynka's. She was always present where she found most company, being there most likely to find also some gossip or kinsman to offer her a drop of vodka, fearing her acrimonious tongue. Franek too, drunk as he was, felt apprehensive, and answered her not a word. She knew, indeed, too much about him and his management of the mill. Triumphant,

and also rather flustered with drink, she set her arms akimbo, and danced and stamped and shouted in time with the music.

"What I say is true," the smith in the adjoining room remarked; "for there it stands, in print in the papers—letters as big as an ox. There is no nation on earth that lives as we do. Not one!—Why, every big landowner domineers over us; so does every priest; so does every official. And all we have to do is work, and starve, and bow low to all men, lest they strike us in the face!—We have so little land of our own, that—for many of us—there presently will not be the least little patch left. . . . Meanwhile, the Squire has more land to himself than two villages put together!—Yesterday they were saying in court that there is to be a redistribution of land."

"Whose land?"

"The gentlemen's, of course."

Yagustynka, who had come in, leaned over the table and laughed.

"Did you give it them, that you take it away! You are marvellous free with other people's property!"

"Folk have self-government there," the smith continued, without heeding the old woman's interruption. "There, everybody goes to school; they all live in gentlemen's houses, and are gentlemen."

"Where may that be?" Yagustynka asked of Antek, who sat at the farther end of the table.

"In warm countries."

"Then," she screamed out angrily, "why does the smith not go there himself? The dirty dog! he is throwing dust in your eyes, lying to you . . . and you blockheads believe him!"

"Yagustynka, pray be so good as to go peacefully whence you came."

"No, I will not! The tavern is for us all; and I, poor as I am, have as much right here as you. You play the teacher here! you, who serve the Jews, who cringe to the officials, who pull off your cap to the Squire from a mile

away! You loud-mouthed ranter, you! Oh, I know of . . ." She said no more. The smith had taken her under the ribs, pushed the door open with his foot, and pitched her into the big room, where she lay sprawling on the floor.

Without a word of reviling, she picked herself up, and called out cheerily:

"As strong as a horse, you are! I'd fain have such a husband!"

The folk burst into a guffaw, and she went out to curse in silence and alone.

By this time the tavern had begun to empty; the music had ceased, and the people were going home. The night was warm and the moon shone bright: no one stayed but the recruits, who shouted and drank their fill, and Ambrose, who, being exceeding mellow, had rushed into the middle of the road, singing and reeling, from one side to the other.

The knot of men who had the blacksmith for leader had also left the place.

The recruits too, a little later, when Yankel was putting out the lights, staggered forth, all arm in arm, and went down the road, bawling songs and howling and bellowing so that the dogs bayed at them.

Kuba alone remained, so fast asleep in the ashes, that Yankel had to awaken him. He would not rise, though, but kicked out, and aimed blows in the air.

"Off, Jew!" he stammered. "I will sleep as I choose. A tiller of the land am I; and you—you are a scurvy rascal and a villain!"

A pail of water sobered him so much that he rose, and with astonishment and dismay, learned that, having drunk a whole rouble's worth, he was in Yankel's debt for that amount.

"What! a quarter of a litre, rum, one herring, tobacco, and another quarter besides: can they make up a rouble? How's that?" His brain was swimming.

Yankel, however, at last convinced him, and they came to an understanding about the gun which the Jew was to



supply; although Kuba was firm in refusing to give him the oats demanded.

"My father was not a thief; neither am I."

"Now go away, Kuba; it is time, and I have still some prayers to say."

"Hear the old hypocrite! Asking a man to steal, and saying his prayers on the top of that!" he muttered, as he walked homewards, trying to remember things and sift them clear: for somehow he could not believe he had drunk a whole rouble's worth. But he was not yet sober, and the cold night air made him dizzy; so he reeled and staggered along, now falling against the hedges, now against the logs of timber piled up outside the huts. He swore.

"May the devil wring your necks for cumbering the road so, rascals! You must have been tipsy when you did it. Yes, drunken wretches! and his Reverence's warnings have been all for naught. . . . His Reverence . . ." Here reflection came to him; he realized the condition he was in, and felt overwhelmed with contrition. He stopped short, looking about him for some hard thing that might be handy. Then he forgot about that, and clutched at his shaggy mane, and beat his face with his fists.

"You drunken wretch, you plague-stricken swine! I will drag you before his Reverence, and he will rebuke you in presence of the whole congregation, and say you are a dog, and a miserable drunkard; you have drunk half a litre of vodka—a whole rouble's worth—and are a beast, worse than a beast!"—A sudden wave of self-compassion then came over him; he sat down in the road and burst into tears.

The moon, large and splendid, was floating through the dark space; like silver nails in the firmament, a few stars shone, sparsely scattered about; a thin grey tissue of mist hung over the pond like a veil, and waved its folds above the village. The world had entered into that unfathomable quiet of the autumn night, save that the few who were going home sang as they went, and dogs were heard to bark now and then.

Also, upon the road in front of the tavern, Ambrose, still reeling from one side to the other, quavered forth his song:

"Tell, Marysia mine,  
Tell, O best and truest,  
Tell whose ale thou brewest,  
Tell, Marysia mine!"

which he repeated with interminable reiteration, until such time as the effects of his potations should cease.

## CHAPTER V

AUTUMN was growing ever more and more autumnal. The pale days passed, dragging themselves over the empty soundless fields, and died away beyond the forest, always stiller, always paler, like the Sacred Host in the glimmer of a taper that is going out.

And every dawn the morning came more and more sluggishly, benumbed, as it were, by the cold of the hoarfrosts, and the sorrowful stillness and the life ebbing out of the land. The sun, dim, shorn of its beams, came blossoming forth from the depths; and crows and daws that had started up from somewhere in the East flew circling round its disk: they skimmed over the fields in long low flight, and croaked with dull mournful voices. Following them, the wind swept along, bitter and bleak, ruffling the stirred waters, burning up all that was left of greenery, and tearing away the last dead leaves from the poplars on the roads: these fell slowly, like trickling tears—tears of blood, shed by the summer as it lay dying.

And every dawn, the villages woke up somewhat later, the cattle went to graze with more slothful steps, the barn-doors swung open with less stridulous creaking; men's voices seemed muffled as they sounded in the deathly void of the fields, and their very life beat now with fainter pulsations. From time to time, they appeared outside their cabins or out in the country, and, suddenly stopping, peered for a long time into the livid murky distance. Or mighty hornèd heads would be sometimes raised from the grass of the yellow pastures; and as they slowly chewed the cud, their eyes would likewise go staring far, far away, while at intervals a hollow lowing would resound through the desolate waste.



And every dawn, it grew colder, darker; the smoke floated lower above the bare orchard trees, and more birds came swarming into the village to take shelter near the granaries. Crows perched on the ridges of the roofs or on the bare boughs, or flitted along close to the ground, croaking hoarsely—singing, as it were, the dismal song of approaching winter.

Noontide was sunny as a rule: but so silent! The murmuring of the woods was heard afar as a faint whisper, and the rippling of the river sounded like sobs of pain. The stillness of that noontide had something of death in it; and on the unfrequented ways and in the leafless orchards there lurked a profound sadness, mingled with a sense of shrinking from what was to come.

The ploughing was nearly over, and some finished their work, ending the last furrow when it was already dark, and looking back at the fields as they went home, wishing and longing for next spring to arrive soon.

Often, before evening set in, chilly rains would fall; and these, as time went on, continued even till twilight—that long autumn twilight when the cabin windows would shine flaming like golden blossoms, and the pools in the deserted roads glistened as glass—and even till the cold wet wind of the night flung its drops against the panes and moaned among the orchard trees.

One broken-winged stork that had remained perforce, and was often seen stalking about the meadows, now began to draw near to Boryna's cornstacks, and Vitek took delight in attracting it by giving it food.

*Dziads*,<sup>1</sup> too, now passed through the village more and more frequently; not only those of the usual kind, who went from house to house with their cavernous wallets and their lengthy prayers, and at whose approach the house-dogs always fell a-baying; but also certain others of a very different sort. These had travelled much and far, to many holy

<sup>1</sup> *Dziad* signifies in Polish a grandfather, an old man, or an ancestor, but is now mostly used to mean a beggar of a special type.  
—Translator's Note.

places; they knew Chenstohova, and Ostrobama, and Kalvaryia well, and in the long evenings they would willingly entertain the village folk by tales of what was going on in the world, and the strange things done in foreign parts. And there were even some who told of the Holy Land, and related such marvels about the vast seas they had crossed, and the adventures which had befallen them, that the people listened in pious amazement, and more than one could scarcely believe that such things could be.

Ah, it was autumn, late autumn now!

Neither rollicking songs, nor merry shouts, nor even the chirruping of little birds, could be heard in the village any more: only the blast howling over the thatched roofs, the icy rain pouring glass-like films down the rattling panes, and the quick dull thudding of the flails on the threshing-floors, which grew daily louder and louder.

It was indeed Autumn, the mother of Winter.

One comfort there was. Hitherto the weather had not been really bad, and the roads had not yet softened into bogs; so possibly it might hold until the fair, to which, as to a village fête, all Lipka was presently going.

It was to take place on St. Cordula's day and, it being the last fair previous to Yuletide, everybody had made preparations.

Many days before, the great question, What ought to be sold? had been debated: whether cattle, or corn, or some livestock of the smaller kind. It would also be needful, since winter was coming on, to make purchases; and those to no small amount. Thence arose not a few bickerings and tiffs and jars in the families: all knew that no one had much money to spare, and cash was harder to get every day.

Besides, it was just then that the taxes had to be paid, and the communal rates too, and various sums to be laid out, borrowed money to be returned in many cases, and not infrequently, the servants' wages were due. So that more than one owner (even of seventeen acres!) was sometimes in straits to know what he had better do.

And so, some took a cow out of the byre, cleansed her



dung-plastered sides with straw, gave her plenty of clover for the night, or a mess of barley boiled with potatoes, and did all they could to fatten her up a little; while others experimented with some blind old jade, completely worthless, endeavouring to make it look at least something like a horse.

And others in order to have their corn ready in time, were busily threshing it all day long.

At Boryna's, too, all were working amain. Aided by Kuba, the old man threshed out all his wheat, while Yuzka and Hanka employed every leisure moment in fattening the sow, or such of the geese as they had selected for sale. And, as rain was expected at any moment, Antek went time and again to the wood with Vitek, to get dry boughs and brush-wood for fuel and litter: of this, some went to the cow-house, and the rest to make a warm outer coating for the hut.

This forced spell of work was kept up till late the last evening before the fair; and it was not until the wheat, all in sacks upon the cart, had been wheeled into the barn, and everything was quite ready for the morrow, that they all sat down together to supper in Boryna's cabin.

The fire was leaping merrily up the chimney, and by its light they ate with leisurely decorum and in silence; but when the meal was over, and the womenfolk had cleared away pots and pans, Boryna drew a little closer to the fire and said:

"We shall have to start ere day breaks."

"Certainly, not a whit later," Antek replied, and set to greasing the harness, while Kuba was engaged in whittling a swipple for his flail; and Vitek, occupied in peeling potatoes for next morning's meal, nevertheless found means to play with Lapa, who lay close by and searched for fleas.

Nothing was heard for some time but the crackling of the logs, the shrill cry of crickets beside the hearth, the splashing of water outside the room, and the clinking of pots and dishes.

"Kuba, do you intend to remain in my service next year?"

He let his knife drop, and gazed so long and steadily into



the fire that Boryna asked him whether he had heard the question.

"Heard it? I have: but I was thinking.—Truly, you have not treated me ill in any wise. . . . Only——" Here he broke off in some confusion.

"Yuzka! Bring vodka and a bit of something.—Are we like Jews, to be dry when we do business?"

Thus he gave his order, and drew a bench closer to the fire. Yuzka presently brought in a bottle and a loaf and a string of sausages, and set them on the bench.

"Drink, Kuba, drink, and say your say."

"Thanks, master.—Well, I'd like to stay, but . . . but . . ."

"Some increase of wages, perhaps?"

"It were good. For see, my sheepskin coat is all in rags. So are my boots; and I need a capote besides. If I go to church as I am, I must stay in the porch. How can I stand before the altar in such a dress?"

"Yes," Boryna sternly put in, "the other Sunday you did not care: you pushed and thrust yourself to where the foremost were standing!"

"It is true. . . . Yes, but . . ." he stammered, greatly abashed and flushing crimson.

"And his Reverence himself teaches us that the elders ought to be respected.—Now, Kuba, drink to a good understanding between us, and hearken to what I say. You know very well that a farm-hand is not a farmer. Everyone has his place, given to him by our Lord. To you also hath the Lord Jesus given yours. Keep it therefore, do not push forward, nor set yourself above other folk, for this were a grievous sin. His Reverence will tell you the very same thing. It must be so, else there would be no order in the world.—Do you follow me?"

"I am not a brute beast, and know what words mean."

"Well, then, see to it that you do not set yourself above anyone."

"But my only desire was to be nearer God's altar!"

"In whatsoever nook you are, God will hear you: fear

nothing. Also, why should you thrust yourself amongst the foremost, since all here know you?"

"You are right, very right. If I were a farmer, I should bear the canopy and support his Reverence, and sit on a bench, and sing aloud out of a book. But," he concluded, with a sigh, "being only a labourer—though a husbandman's son, mind you!—it behoves me to stand in the vestibule, or outside in the porch, like a dog."

"So is it ordained throughout the world, and you will not change it by taking thought."

"Without doubt I shall not."

"Take another drop, Kuba, and say what increase of wages you would have."

Kuba took the vodka. Now, as he was already somewhat flustered, he presently felt as in the tavern, with Michael (from the organist's) or any other boon companion at his side, whom he could talk with freely and joyously, as an equal. So he undid a button or two of his capote, stretched out his legs, struck the bench with his fist, and cried out:

"Four paper roubles more, with a silver one besides, and I'll stay with you!"

"You're drunk or mad, I fancy," was Boryna's protest; but Kuba, now fairly started in pursuit of what he wished and dreamed for, never heard his master's words. His imagination was no longer under control, his mind began to take wings, his self-assurance to grow great, and he felt himself as high and mighty as any farmer might feel.

"Yes. Four paper roubles more, and one other as earnest money, and I'll stay. If not, then, curse it! I'll go to the fair. There I shall find service, were it only as a coachman at some manor. They know me—know I am honest, and able to do any farm work, afield or in the house; many a farmer might learn a good deal of me, how I tend the cattle.—Or else . . . I know how to shoot, and can get birds for his Reverence, or for Yankel. . . . Or else . . ."

"See him!" the old man roared; "behold how grandly this lame one is prancing!"

The insult effectually sobered Kuba, and roused him from



his dreamings. He said no more of what he could do; but held doggedly none the less to what he had said. Boryna had to give way by half a rouble or one *zloty* at a time, and ended by agreeing to give him three roubles more, and a couple of shirts in lieu of earnest money.

"Ho! Ho! what a fellow you are!" he said, as he drank with him to clinch the agreement, though he was angry at having to spend so much. All the same he thought Kuba was worth it, and more. A man as good as two for hard work; scrupulously honest besides, and more heedful of the beasts he tended than of himself; one, moreover, so well acquainted with husbandry that he could be relied on both to do his duty, and to see that the others did theirs.

After settling two or three minor points, Kuba was about to leave. At the door, however, he turned round, and spoke in faltering tones:

"The agreement is made, then: three roubles and a couple of shirts. But . . . but . . . I beseech you, don't sell the filly. I saw her into the world, and spread my sheepskin over her, lest she should die of cold. . . . I could never bear to see her ill-used, perhaps by a Jew! . . . A horse is so docile, a man is nothing beside it. . . . Please don't sell her!"

"I never thought of doing such a thing."

"Folk talked of it in the tavern, and I heard."

"Meddlesome dogs and busybodies! They always know best what is to be done."

Kuba was so delighted that, had he dared, he would have embraced his master's knees. He made the best of his way to bed, for it was late, and there was the fair on the morrow.

. . . . .  
Next day, before the cock had crowed twice, every highway and by-way towards Tymov was thronged with people wending their way thither.

There had been a heavy rain ere morning. In the East it had cleared up a little, but the sky was threatening, with



many a dun-coloured cloud. Over the low-lying fields crept fogs, dripping wet and grey as coarse canvas; and the pathways glistened with many a pool.

They had set out from Lipka at early dawn.

All along the poplar-planted road beyond the church and as far as the forest stretched a chain of slowly-rolling wagons, one close after another; and either side of the highway was variegated by a line of red petticoats and white capotes.

The multitude was so great that all the village seemed to be there.

The poorer husbandmen went on foot; so did the women and the farm-hands and the lasses. So, too, did some common labourers and inferior workers, this being the fair at which service was taken or changed.

Some went to buy, and some to sell, and some just to enjoy the fair.

One man led a cow or a big calf by a rope; one drove a flock of shorn sheep in front of him; another walked behind a sow with her little ones, or a lot of white geese, with their wings tied; another trotted by, riding a sorry nag; while from under many an apron the red comb of a cock peered forth.—The wagons and carts, too, were well laden. Often, from the basketwork and straw within one of them, a hog's snout would appear, squealing clamorously, till the geese gagged in consternation, and the dogs that ran to market by their masters' sides, barked in chorus.

But Boryna only left his cabin when the day had fully risen, and the sky had quite cleared. Hanka and Yuzka had started before him at the very break of day, with the sow and the fatted pig; and Antek had taken ten sacks of wheat and fifty pounds of red clover-seed in the cart. Kuba alone had remained at home, with Vitek, and old Yagustynka, hired to cook the dinner and milk the cows.

Vitek, who wanted to go to the fair, was blubbing noisily outside the cow-house.

"What is the matter with the fool?" Boryna grunted; and making the sign of the Cross, he started off on foot, expecting that someone would give him a lift by the way.

Which also came to pass; for just beyond the tavern the organist, who was driving in a britzka with a couple of lusty horses, caught up with him.

"What, Matthias, are you on foot?"

"Aye, stretching my legs.—Praised be Jesus Christ!"

"For ever!" the organist's wife answered. "Jump up; there is room for you."

"Many thanks. I should have walked, but, as the saying is: 'They that ride in a cart are ay joyful at heart'"—and he sat down on the front seat, with his back to the horses.

"And so young Yanek is not at school now? How's that?" he inquired of a lad who was driving, and sitting in front with a farm-hand.

"Oh, I'm only just here for the fair!" he sang out in reply. He was the organist's son. His father said, tapping a box which he held out to Boryna: "French snuff: take a pinch." They both did so, and both sneezed solemnly.

"Well, how goes it with you? Selling anything to-day?"

"Nothing much. Wheat sent earlier, and a pig, taken by the girls."

"Not bad, not bad at all!" the organist's wife exclaimed. "Yanek, put this comforter on: it is chilly."

"Oh, I am all right," he answered; but she insisted on his putting it on.

"But," Boryna pointed out, "think of my expenses; I can scarce pay my way."

"Matthias, do not complain; you have no reason to. Thank God that you have enough."

Boryna, not liking to be thus reprov'd in the presence of a hired man, leaned forward hastily, and whispered:

"Is Yanek to remain at school much longer?"

"Only till Easter."

"And after? Is he to stay at home, or become an official?"

"My good man, what should he be doing at home? We have lots of children, and only fifteen acres. And times are hard—hard as stones!—There are christenings in plenty indeed; but what do we get from them?"



"On the other hand," Boryna satirically remarked, "there is no lack of funerals."

"And what do funerals bring us? Nobody dies but poor people. A farmer's burial, really worth something to us, comes only once or twice a year."

"And votive masses," she added, "are ever more seldom, and people bargain for them like Jews!"

"That," Boryna explained, "is on account of present hard times, and poverty."

"Also because men now think less of their salvation, and of the duty to help poor souls in purgatory!"

The organist here added: "And we get less from the manors as well. Formerly, when on our rounds at harvest-time, or offering wafers, or at Yuletide, or with our lists of parishioners newly made up, we used to go straight to the manor, where they grudged us neither corn, nor money, nor flour for pastry. And now, good heavens! all have grown so stingy that, if one offers us a little sheaf of rye, it must have been gnawed by mice; and if a bushel of oats, it will be chaff for the greater part. Had we not a bit of land, we should have to beg our bread," he concluded, holding out his snuffbox to Boryna.

"True, true," the latter replied, though under no delusion. He well knew the organist had money, some in the bank, some out at interest, and profitably lent to farm-hands. So he only smiled to hear his lamentations, and once more asked about Yanek.

"Are you going to make a Government clerk of him?"

"Of him? My Yanek—a Government official? I have not denied myself bread for him that the poor boy should have to finish his classes. No, no; he shall be a priest."

"What, a priest?"

"Aye, why not? Shall he lose aught thereby? Whom does it hurt to become a priest?"

"No one. No one, certainly," he answered with deliberation, looking respectfully over his shoulder at the young fellow. "It is an honour. And also, as the saying is: 'A priest's kith and kin will never grow thin.'"



"They said that Staho, the miller's son, was to enter the seminary; but I hear he is now at a college, studying medicine."

"Ah! such an evil-liver, a priest! Why, my servant Magda is six months with child—and by him!"

"By the miller's man, they say."

"No. His mother says so, but it is only to screen him. Oh, such a profligate! . . . God forbid! . . . As a physician, he'll do very well."

Boryna said: "Yes, yes, a priest's vocation is by far the best," and continued to humour her, tactfully listening to her gossip, while the organist would many a time lift his cap, answering "For ever!" to the greetings of those he passed by. They went at a good trot; Yanek drove splendidly, threading his way among the wagons and people and livestock upon the road, till they got to the forest, where the crush was not so great, and the road wider.

There they came up with Dominikova, who was going with Yagna and Simon, and a cow tied by the horns to the cart, from which, hissing like so many adders, the white necks of some ganders protruded.

They greeted each other, and Boryna went so far, when the wagons were abreast, as to lean forwards, and say: "You will be late!"

"Oh, we've time in plenty!" Yagna laughed in reply.

When they had been passed, the organist's son looked round at her several times, and asked at last:

"Is that Dominikova's Yagna?"

"The same, yes," Boryna returned, with his eyes upon her, a good way behind already.

"I was not sure: it is a good couple of years since I last saw her."

"Ah, she was then tending kine. She's very young still; but she has grown as stout as a clover-fed heifer."

"Aye, aye; comely she is; so well-favoured that every week messengers are sent to her with vodka—and a proposal."

"But she'll none of them. The old woman thinks," the

organist's wife whispered spitefully, "that a steward may come for her, and drive all the peasants away."

"Well, she would do, even for the wife of a thirty-five acres' farmer."

"O Matthias, if you think so much of the lass, send proposers to her yourself," she said with a laugh. Thenceforward Boryna spoke not one word.

"You town-bred riff-raff, here become a big personage—who look under the tail of every peasant's hen to see if there are eggs for you—who seek for money in every peasant's fist—will you make a mock of me, a husbandman born! You leave Yagna alone!" So he thought, and looked straight in front of him, in a very ill humour indeed, at Dominikova's cart, bright with the gleams of aprons thrown over kerchiefs, and now rapidly dropping astern; for Yanek was flogging the horses vigorously, and their hoofs made great holes in the mud.

The good woman went on talking, but to no purpose. Boryna only nodded, or mumbled indistinctly, and stubbornly refrained from any utterance whatever.

And no sooner had they reached the unspeakable pavement of the little town, than he got down, with thanks for the lift.

"We shall be returning about nightfall," she said, and asked whether he would care to go back with them.

"Very much obliged to you," he replied, "but I have horses of my own. People would jest—say I was applying for the post of organ-blower or assistant; and I can't sing a note or learn how to use an extinguisher!"

They went down a by-street, and he walked with swift steps up a main one, till he got to the market-place. It was a first-class fair, and the streets were already pretty well crowded. All the thoroughfares, squares, lanes and courtyards were full of people and vehicles and all sorts of country produce, like a flood into which human rivers were constantly flowing, with dense waves rolling through the narrow alleys and seeming about to bring the houses down, until it poured into the great square near the mon-



astery. On the way townwards, there had been relatively little mud; but here, trodden and trampled by thousands of feet, it was ankle-deep, splashing in every direction from under the wheels of the carts.

Every instant, the din grew louder. Nothing could be heard distinctly save a cow bellowing now and then, a barrel-organ accompanying the merry-go-round, the obstreperous wailing of *Dziads*, or the ear-splitting whistles of basket-makers.

Truly, it was a very big fair, so crowded that one could scarce make one's way forwards; and by the time that Boryna had reached the main square, he had to push and elbow a passage by main force amongst the stalls.

And the things that were there! They could not be told or even conceived. How, then, is it possible to describe them?

And, first, those lofty canvas booths, which stood in front of the convent in two rows, all of them devoted to articles for women's use: pieces of linen cloth, and kerchiefs, suspended from poles, and all of them as scarlet as scarlet poppies, making the eyes ache; and then, close by, another booth hung with the same wares, but all of the purest yellow; and another, again, of the deep crimson of the beetroot. . . . But who could remember all these things?

Lasses and women stood there in such serried crowds that there was not room, as they say, to thrust a stick in amongst them—some bargaining and choosing; and some only looking on, gloating over those things of beauty!

Farther, there were stalls that positively blazed with beads, looking-glasses, tinsel ornaments, and ribbons and flowers—green and golden and many-coloured—and caps too . . . and the Lord knows what besides!

Elsewhere, the sellers of holy images had set them forth in glazed and gilded frames, so gloriously brilliant that (although they only stood ranged along the walls, or even lay along the ground) more than one peasant would take his hat off and make the sign of the Holy Cross.

Boryna bought Yuzka the kerchief he had promised



her in spring, and withdrew, pushing his way onwards to the swine-market beyond the monastery. He made but slow progress, owing both to the terrible crush and to the many interesting objects which he saw.

The capmakers, for instance, had put up wide ladders in front of their shops, and embellished these with caps from top to bottom.

The bootmakers had formed a real lane with trestles and horses, from which endless rows of boots dangled, suspended by the lugs: some of the common sort—tawny and only requiring to be greased lest the water should get in; some, lustrous with blacking like varnish; some, women's boots, high-heeled, red-laced, and beautifully polished.

Farther were the saddlers' stalls, superb with horse-collars and harnesses hanging in festoon from many a peg.

Then came the booths of the rope-makers, of them that sold nets, and of the itinerant sieve-venders; of those whose trade was to go from fair to fair with groats for sale; and of the wheelwrights and of the tanners.

Elsewhere, tailors and furriers had set forth their respective goods, the latter pungent in the nostrils with the spices used to preserve them; and they, since winter was coming on, had customers not a few.

After these came rows of tables sheltered under canvas roofs, displaying enormous coils of russet-hued sausages, as thick as a ship's mooring-rope; and piles of yellow fat and grease, brown flitches of smoked bacon, whole sides of fat salt pork, and hams by scores, rose in multitudinous tiers: while at other stalls, entire carcasses of hogs were hooked up, wide-opened, gaping, and so dripping with blood that the dogs gathered round, and had to be driven away.

Close by the butchers were their brethren of the baking-oven; and on thick layers of straw, on wagons, upon tables and in baskets, and wheresoever they could be placed, lay monstrous piles of loaves, each as large as a small cart-wheel. Cakes, too, were there, glazed over with yellow egg-yolks; and little rolls, and great ones as well.

Nor were stalls for playthings wanting. Some were made of gingerbread, in the shape of many a kind of beast, of soldiers, and hearts—and strange forms, whose meaning no one could make out. At other stalls you could have seen almanacs, prayer-books, tales about robbers and fierce *Magielons*;<sup>1</sup> at others, cheap whistles, mouth-organs, singing-birds of baked clay, and similar musical instruments were to be bought, on which those "Jew rascals" who sold them made such a row as was hardly to be borne; for the birds chirped, the trumpets blew, the whistles squeaked with long-drawn shrillness, and the little kettledrums at times joined in, beating a tattoo: and the uproar was enough to split any man's head.

But in the centre of the market-place, under the trees, coopers, tinmen and earthenware dealers had made up a group apart. There were so many pots, pans, pipkins and porringers that it was no easy thing to get past. Beyond these were stationed the joiners, with a show of painted bedsteads and chests, wardrobes, and tiers of shelves, and tables.

Now, in every place—upon the carts, along the walls, in the gutters, and, in short, wherever they found room—saleswomen were sitting: with onions in strings, or in baskets; with cloth fabrics and petticoats of their own making; with eggs, cheeses, mushrooms, pats of butter of oblong shape and wrapped in a linen cloth. Some had potatoes to sell, some a couple of geese, or a fowl already plucked and drawn; others, flax fibres finely combed out, or skeins of spun flaxen thread. Each of them sat by her wares and chatted pleasantly with her neighbour, as folk are wont to do at the fair. And when a purchaser appeared, they dealt with him quietly, gravely, leisurely, as decent peasant people: not like those Jews, who quarrel and scream and push one another, as though they were out of their minds.

Amid carts and booths, smoke was seen here and there

<sup>1</sup> *Magielon*, probably from "Magellan," means a wild adventurer, the hero of some tale of derring-do.—*Translator's Note*.



curling up from sheet-iron stoves. Here they sold hot tea. At others, there were eatables: fried sausages, cabbage, *barszcz*<sup>1</sup> and boiled potatoes.

Everywhere, *Dziads* were about in vast swarms: the blind, the halt, the dumb; cripples with never an arm, cripples with never a leg: just as at a local village fête. They played hymn tunes on tiny kits they held, or sang godly songs, clinking money in their wooden bowls. From the house-walls, from among the wagons, from the mud-deluged street, they all came to beg timidly, and implore a trifle in money or in kind.

On all this did Boryna gaze, not infrequently with admiration, as he exchanged a few words with acquaintances whom he met. At last he got to the swine-market, which was beyond the monastery: a very large space of sandy ground, with a few houses sprinkled here and there. Close to the monastery garden wall, and shaded by many a huge oak-tree that stretched out its branches over the wall, still covered with withered leaves, were grouped a good many people and carts, together with a large number of swine brought to the fair for sale.

He soon saw Hanka and Yuzka, who stood at the outside of the group.

"Have you sold, hey?"

"Oh, the butchers have been here already to bargain for the sow; but they offer too little."

"Are swine dear?"

"Dear? Not at all. So many have come, and the buyers are too few."

"Anybody from Lipka?"

"The Klembas have brought some small pigs; and Simon, Dominikova's son, has one too."

"Well, be as quick as you can, that you may enjoy the fair."

"We have enough of waiting already."

"How much will they give for the sow?"

<sup>1</sup> *Barszcz*—pronounced "barshch"—a soup made of sour beetroots.  
—Translator's Note.



"Thirty paper roubles. They say she is not well fed; big bones, but no fat on them."

"That's the biggest of lies! She has four fingers' thickness of fat!" he cried, feeling the sow's back and sides. "The young pig is not fat on the sides, but then its hams are well clad," he added, driving it out of the wet sand where it was wallowing and half buried.

"Sell at thirty-five. I shall just see Antek, and come back to you directly.—Haven't you a mind to eat?"

"Our bread is eaten already."

"I'll buy you a bit of sausage besides. Only get a good price for the pigs."

"Father, won't you think of buying me the kerchief you promised last spring?"

Boryna put his hand to his bosom, but stopped, as though struck with some idea, took out his hand again, and waved it, saying merely:

"You shall have it, Yuzka."

Instantly he moved off, for he had descried Yagna's face amongst the wagons; but before he got to her, she had disappeared, and was nowhere to be seen. So he went in search of Antek: no easy task, for the street from the swine-market to the great square was so thronged with carts, one after another and several abreast, that one could drive past only with the greatest care and difficulty.

However, he happened upon him at once, sitting on the sacks of wheat, and flicking with his whip at the Jews' poultry, which came running about near the bags out of which the horses were eating, while he made surly replies to the bargainners.

"I said seven, and seven it shall be."

"I give six and a half: the wheat is damaged."

"You scurvy dog! let me but fetch a blow at your ugly face, and it will be damaged enough: but my wheat is as good as good can be."

"Perhaps; but it's damp. . . . I'll take it by measure, and at six roubles five *zloty*."

"No. By weight, and at seven.—I have said."

"But, my good farmer, why so angry? Buying or not buying, one may always try to bargain."

"Then bargain away, if it amuses you." And he paid no more heed to the Jews, who came opening the sacks one after another, to examine the wheat.

"Antek, I am just going to the scrivener's. I shall be back in the twinkling of an eye."

"What? With your complaint against the manor-folk?"

"Think you I'll not resent the wrong done me?"

"Just get hold of the keeper, fasten him to a pine-trunk, and cudgel him till his ribs clatter: then you'll have justice done!"

"Aye, and serve him right too; but the manor-folk must come in for their share," he answered in a hard voice.

"Hand me over a *zloty*."

"What for?"

"To drink a drop and eat a bit."

"Always looking into your father's purse! Have you no money of your own?"

Antek, furious, turned his back on his father, whistling derisively; and the old man, though very unwillingly, pulled out a *zloty* and gave it to him.

"Yes; coin your blood to money, and give it away to all!" he thought, as he pushed his way towards a large tavern at the corner, where many guests had come to eat. The scrivener lived in a tiny room in the courtyard. Clad only in his shirt, unwashed, unkempt, but with a cigar in his mouth, he was then sitting at a table near the window.—On a mattress in the corner a woman lay, with a greatcoat over her.

"Sit down, my good man!" He tossed some garments on to the floor off a chair which he offered to Boryna, who presently explained the whole business to him in detail.

"As sure as a Pater ends with Amen, you'll get a verdict in your favour! What! A cow dead, and the boy frightened into an illness! We are bound to win!" He rubbed his hands, and looked about the table for some paper.



"But the boy is quite well."

"All the same, he might have fallen ill: the keeper gave him a beating."

"Not him, but a neighbour's cowherd."

"A pity; that would have been still better. But we shall word it so that it may seem both that the cow died, and that the boy had an illness. Let the manor-folk pay!"

"Surely. I want nothing but justice."

"I'll draw up your complaint instantly.—Franka, you sluggard!" he cried, kicking the woman on the mattress so hard that she lifted up her tousled head. "Fetch us vodka and something to eat!"

"I have not one kopek, Gutek; and they'll give us nothing on trust, you know," she grumbled, and, rising from her disorderly couch, yawned and stretched herself. She was a big woman, with a drunkard's face, bruised and bloated, but the thin reedy voice of a baby.

The scrivener set to work, with noisy pen scratching the paper. He puffed at his cigar, blowing the smoke into Boryna's face, as the latter was looking on. Now and then he paused to rub his freckled hands and turn his haggard pimply face towards Franka. He wore a great black moustache; his front teeth were broken, his lips livid.

The complaint was soon made out. It cost a rouble, and another for the stamp; and he agreed to present it at the court for three more.

Boryna willingly allowed the expenses incurred, feeling sure that the manor would have to pay them, with heavy damages besides.

"There must be justice in the world!" he cried, on departing.

"If we don't win in the Communal Court, we shall try the Assembly; if not there, why then, the District Court, and then the Judgment Chamber: I won't give in."

"Why should I abandon what is mine?" he said, with fierce obstinacy. "And to whom? To those manor-folk, owners of forests and of fields without end? No!"

Such thoughts were filling his mind, as he went forth into



the market-place: but just as he passed the capmakers' stalls, he met with Yagna.

There she stood, with one dark-blue cap on her head, cheapening another.

"See here, Matthias! this 'yellow one'<sup>1</sup> would have me believe this is a good cap: but no doubt he is lying."

"A very nice cap. Is't for Andrew?"

"It is: Simon's is already bought."

"Will it not be too small for him?"

"His head is just the size of mine."

"What a well-favoured stable-boy you would make!"

"Ah! shouldn't I?" she exclaimed, with a jaunty air, and cocking her cap on one side.

"I'd take you to my service directly!"

"Only my terms might prove much too high." She laughed.

"For some, perhaps; not for me."

"But I'd do no work in the fields."

"Oh, I would do the work for you, Yagna!" he whispered, and the look he darted at her was so passionate that she shrank back in confusion, and paid for the cap without bargaining.

"Have you sold your cow?" he asked her, after a time, when he had become more master of himself, and overcome the sensation which had so suddenly gone to his head, like strong vodka.

"Yes, they bought her for the priest in Yertzov. Mother has gone with the organist, who wants to engage a farm-labourer."

"Well then, let's just go and take a drop of sweetened vodka together."

"What's that you say?"

"You are cold, Yagna; it will warm you somewhat."

"Go with you for a drink? . . . Where could I go?"

"Then, Yagna, I'll bring some, and we'll drink it here together."

<sup>1</sup> *Yellow one*.—A nickname sometimes given to Jews by peasants.  
—Translator's Note.

"God reward your kindness, but I must look for Mother."

"Yagna, I'll help you to find her," he whispered very low, and going foremost, elbowed a way for her so powerfully that she was easily able to get through the crowd. But when they stood before the booths of linen goods, the girl walked more slowly, and presently stopped, her eyes beaming with joy at the various objects before her.

"Oh, what splendid things! Lord, dear Lord!" she murmured, stopping in front of the ribbons which, hanging above her, waved in the air, like a mobile and flaming rainbow.

"Choose the one you like best, Yagna!"

"Why, that yellow one embroidered with flowers must cost a rouble, or perhaps even ten *zloty*!"

"Let not that trouble you, but take it."

Yagna, however—regretfully indeed and with a great effort—let the ribbon go, and passed on to the next booth: Boryna remaining a little behind for a few instants.

Now her gaze again fell on kerchiefs, and stuffs for bodices, and jackets.

"O Lord, O Lord! what beautiful things!" she murmured low, rapt with the glamour of it all; and more than once she would plunge her quivering hands into those folds of green or red satin, till her eyes grew dim and her heart went pit-a-pat with delight.

And what head-dresses those kerchiefs made! Scarlet silk, embroidered all round with green flowers; or all of a golden hue; or a deep blue, like the sky after rain! And those—the finest of them all—of changeful shimmering colours, pure as water shining in the evening sunlight, and no heavier than floating gossamer! . . . No, she could not help it: she must try that kerchief on her head, and see herself in the looking-glass the Jewess of the booth was holding out to her.

Yes, it suited her to perfection; it was like a glorious aureole over her light flaxen tresses, and made the deep azure of her eyes shine so intensely with the joy of it that they glowed violet amid the splendour of her face. And people

turned to gaze at her, so handsome she appeared, surrounded with so bright an emanation of youth and health!

"Is not this the daughter of some Squire, disguising herself?" they whispered among themselves.

For a long time she contemplated the kerchief, and then, with a deep sigh, took it off, and set to bargaining: not meaning to buy it—this was impossible—but only for the pleasure of enjoying its beauty a little longer.

Presently, however, her ardour cooled. The Jewess had put the price at five roubles!—Even Boryna at once dissuaded her.

Again they came to a stop before the stalls of beads. How many strings there were! And how they looked! As if the whole stall were oversprinkled with precious gems: so brilliant, so resplendent! Hard, indeed, it was to take one's eyes away from them—from those amber globules of pellucid gold, looking for all the world as if made of sweet-scented resin; and the coral drops, like threaded beads of blood; and the white pearls, as big as hazel-nuts; and those other drops of silver and of gold!

Yagna tried on more than one, and made her choice of the most beautiful. At last she caught sight of one very lovely string of coral beads, passed it four times round her neck, and, turning to the old man, said:

"Does it suit me? Tell me true."

"Splendidly, Yagna!—But coral beads are no strange thing to me. In a chest at my home there lies a necklace of eight rows. 'Twas my wife's. Every bead is as big as the biggest pea. "This he said to her with studied indifference.

"And what's that to me, if it is not mine?" She flung the beads back and hastened away, moody and repining.

"Yagna, let's sit down awhile."

"I must go to mother."

"No fear of her leaving you behind."

They sat down together on the shaft of a wagon.

"It's a big fair," remarked Boryna, looking round the market-place.



"It's not small," she returned, casting a sorrowful glance at the stalls they had left behind them, and heaving a deep sigh. A pause ensued; then, trying to shake off her sadness, she spoke:

"Ah, well it is for anyone who is a Squire! Once I saw the daughter of the Squire of Vola, with other ladies, buying, as they did at every fair, such quantities of things that they were carried by a manservant!"

"'Who goes oft to the fair shall lose all he has there.'" Boryna remarked.

"The proverb is not for them."

"Not so long as they can borrow from Jews," he answered, with such bitterness that Yagna stared at him, knowing not what to reply. Looking away from her, he asked, in a low voice:

"They have been to you with a proposal from Michael, Voytek's son, have they not?"

"They went away as they came. Such a dolt, to send a proposal to me!"

Boryna then rose hurriedly, taking out of his bosom a kerchief, and something else wrapped up in paper.

"Keep this, Yagna; I must go to Antek."

Her eyes sparkled at the name. "Is he at the fair?"

"Yes; down that lane, selling the corn.—Take this, Yagna, it is for you," he added, seeing her gaze at the kerchief with bewildered eyes.

"Do you give it me? Me—really? Oh, how pretty it is!" She unwrapped the paper. There lay the very same ribbon that had pleased her so vastly just before. "Can you be in earnest?" she exclaimed. "Why do you give me all this? It is very costly, and the kerchief is of pure silk."

"Take it, Yagna, take it, it is all bought for you. And when some peasant shall come to drink to you, do not drink back to him. Why hurry?—Now, I must go."

"Are these things my own? Say you true?"

"And wherefore should I lie to you?"

"I can scarce believe it," she said, unwrapping the kerchief, and then the ribbon again.

"God be with you, Yagna!"

"How I thank you, Matthias!"

He left her. Yagna once more unwrapped the things, and gloated over them. Then she wrapped them up both together, with a mind to run after him and give them back: for how could she accept such gifts from a stranger? But he was no longer in sight. So she walked along slowly, to seek her mother, secretly and fingering with intense pleasure the parcel hidden in her bosom. She was full of joy; her cheeks glowed red, and her white teeth flashed as she smiled.

"Yagna! Pray give some aid to a poor creature. Your people are good, true Christians! I'll say a Hail Mary for your departed. . . . O Yagna!"

Yagna, thus recalled to herself, looked to see who it was that spoke, and saw Agatha, who was sitting close to the monastery wall, upon a bundle of straw: for the mud was there more than ankle-deep.

Coming to a standstill, she fumbled in her dress for some coppers; and Agatha, overjoyed to have met someone of her village, began to ask her what was going on at Lipka.

"Are all the potatoes in?"

"To the very last."

"Anything new at the Klembas'?"

"What, they have sent you away to beg . . . and you still care about them?"

"Sent me away? That they did not; I went by myself, for it was needful. And I care about them, because they are my kinsfolk."

"And what are you doing now?"

"Going from church to church, from hamlet to hamlet, from fair to fair; and, as guerdon for my prayers, the good people give me, here a corner to sleep in, there a morsel to feed me, and at times a copper or two. The people are good; they will not let a poor creature starve, not they!" She broke off, and asked, with some hesitation: "Do you know if all the Klembas are in good health?"

"They are; and how are you?"

"Oh, my health is nothing to boast of. Always a pain in my chest; and when I take cold, I spit hot blood. I shall not last long, no!—If I can but hold out till spring, I will go back to the village to die among my own people. I ask naught else of our Lord . . . Naught else."

Say a prayer for Father's soul?" Yagna whispered, slipping some coins into her hand.

"That will be for all the holy souls in purgatory; for as it is, I always pray for all those I know, living and dead.—But . . . Yagna! . . . Have they sent no one to you with vodka?"

"Yes."

"And you would drink back to none?"

"To none," she replied briefly. "God be with you, and come next spring to see us." And she went to rejoin her mother, whom she perceived at some distance with the organist.

Boryna was returning to Antek, but slowly, both on account of the crowds, and because the thought of Yagna was haunting him. Before he saw his son, however, the blacksmith met him. They greeted one another, and walked on side by side without speaking. At last:

"Are you going to settle with me, or not?" the smith began, in no friendly voice. Boryna was up in arms at once.

"Settle what? Lipka was the place to speak with me."

"These three years I have been waiting. People advise me to bring an action at law . . . but . . ."

"Do so. I'll introduce you to a scrivener; yes, and pay him a rouble to draw up a complaint for you!"

". . . But I think," the smith went on, with crafty moderation, "it were best to have a friendly understanding."

"Right. 'By a neighbourly course get what's not got by force!'"

"You say wisely."

"You will get it neither in one way nor in the other."



"I have always told my wife that you, Father, loved justice."

"Everyone wants justice . . . on his side. I am indifferent, for I owe nothing." At those stern words, the blacksmith saw he would get nothing by his former tactics, so he changed them. As if there had been no dispute, he very quietly uttered the request:

"Will you stand me a drink? I should like one."

"Certainly, dearest son-in-law: yes, even should you ask for a litre." The tones were rather sneering; but they entered the corner tavern together. Here they found Ambrose, not drinking, but seated in a corner, sulky and sad.

"I feel my bones ache; we shall have nasty weather," Ambrose predicted.

They drank once and again, but saying not a word, each angry with the other.

"You take your vodka as they do at a funeral," Ambrose said; he felt sore at not being invited, for he had scarcely taken anything that morning.

"How can we talk? Father-in-law is selling so much to-day that he must think to whom he had best lend his cash out at interest."

"Matthias, Matthias!" cried Ambrose; I say to you that our Lord . . ."

"Matthias I am—for some, not for you, you saucy fellow!—Look at him! 'Fain would the swine say to the swineherd, Brother!'"

The smith had already taken a couple of stiff drams, and felt inclined to argue. He lowered his tone, to say:

"Father-in-law, tell me once for all: will you, or will you not, give what I ask?"

"You have heard my answer. I cannot take my land to the grave with me; but, while I am living, not one acre will I give up. I will not be fed at your expense, and mean to enjoy a year or two in this world still."

"Then pay me off!"

"I have spoken: have you heard?"

"He is looking out," Ambrose whispered, "for a third wife. What are his children to him?"

"That's likely, indeed!"

"Marry I shall, if I choose," put in Boryna. "Do you object?"

"Object? No; but . . ."

"If I choose, I shall send a proposal—yes, and no later than to-morrow!"

"Do so. What have I against it? Only let me have Red-and-White's calf, and I'll even help you all I can. You, a reasonable man, must know what is best for you. I have said so many a time to my wife: you want a woman in the house to keep it in order."

"Michael! You said that?"

"May I die unshriven if I did not! Yes, I did say so. I, who advise the whole village, each man as he requires, should I not know what is good for you?"

"You rogue, you are lying like a gipsy!—But come to-morrow, and you shall have the calf. . . . What I am asked for, I may give; but claim it as a right, and you'll get only a broken cudgel—or worse."

They continued their potations, the smith now treating Boryna, and inviting Ambrose to join them. This he did very willingly, and told many a merry tale and jest, so that they presently roared with laughter.

The two separated on good terms. But neither trusted the other a jot.—Each was transparent to each as a pane of glass, each as easy to know as a horse with a star on the forehead.

Ambrose remained, expecting gossips and acquaintances willing to offer him the least little drop. For "a hungry dog will try even to catch a fly."

The fair was drawing to its close.

For a moment the sun had shone out at noon, flashing on the world like the glint of a brandished mirror; then it plunged anew behind the clouds. Before evening had come, everything was in profound gloom; heavy masses of vapour rolled down, almost touching the house-roofs, and a fine

rain drizzled as though sifted through a sieve. . . . The folk therefore hastened to drive away, anxious to get home before nightfall and a heavy downpour.

Twilight fell, swift, louring, and dank: the town was once more empty and silent.

Only along a wall here and there, some *Dziads* were moaning, and the voices of revelling and quarrelling were loud in the taverns.

Evening was well advanced when Boryna drove away with his people. They had sold all they brought, purchased various articles, and enjoyed the fair to the full. Antek flogged the horses with all his might, and the cart hurtled athwart the depths of the mud; for he felt cold, and they had all drunk plentifully. The old man, stingy though he was, and ready to make a fuss for a *grosz*<sup>1</sup> had that day treated them so well with things to eat and drink, and friendly words, that they were all amazed at him.

When they reached the forest, it was black night—so dark that nothing could be seen. The rain was falling, ever in larger drops. Along the road a clatter of wagon-wheels, the brawling howl of a drunken song, or the sucking steps of someone plodding in the mire, were to be heard.

But, in the middle of the poplar-road, whose trees murmured and muttered as though shivering with cold, Ambrose, now quite drunk, staggered along from one side to the other, now stumbling against a tree, now falling into the mud; but he would quickly rise and go on, singing, as was his wont, with noisy vociferation.

<sup>1</sup> *Grosz*—the smallest Polish coin—about one-fourth of an American cent.—*Translator's Note.*



## CHAPTER VI

THE rain had now begun to come down in earnest. Ever since the fair, all things had been drowned in a grey turbid shimmer, through which only the dim outlines of the forest or the hamlet loomed, embroidered, as it were, on a ground of wet canvas.

The autumn downpours swooped down, icily cold, piercingly sharp, and never-ending.

The rain, like scourges of ashen-grey hue, unceasingly beat upon the earth, soaking every tree to its very centre, and making every blade of grass quiver, as in dire pain.

From underneath those thick clouds and that ghastly grey rain there would appear, now and again, strips of fields, blackened, flat, and sodden; or there would gleam forth streaks of foam-flecked water, flowing down the furrows; or the trees along the pathways would stand forth, dark and stark, as their dripping branches, wet to the inmost pith, shaking off the last rags of leaves, seemed struggling desperately, like hounds straining at a leash.

The deserted roads were now transformed into interminable quagmires of filth.

The short, sad, sunless days crawled by; bleak and dull, with ceaseless sounds of monotonous plashing, fell the nights.

Mute were the fields, dumb the hamlets, silent the woods. The houses dusky and colourless, seemed melting into and making one with the earth, the fences, and the stripped orchards, tossing their boughs with feeble moans.

A livid whirling downpour had covered the land, taken all colour out of it, quenched its tints, and plunged the world into twilight. All seemed confused, and as in a dream. A sadness rose up from the mouldering fields, from the palsy-

stricken woods, from the dead wilderness; thence it floated like a heavy cloud, lingering about the melancholy cross-ways, under the crucifixes which stretched forth their mournful arms and on the waste roads, where the trees would suddenly quake as with dread, and sob as if in anguish; it looked with vacant stare into each deserted nest, and on each fallen cabin; it crept about the burial-places around the graves of the forgotten dead, and the decaying crosses; it spread over all the country.

And the drizzle was never-ceasing: but when the heavy rain swooped down, it wrapped all Lipka in its folds, so that the dark thatches, the dank stones of the enclosures, the dingy tangles of smoke which twirled above the chimneys and wandered over the orchards, were visible only at rare intervals.

The village was noiseless, except for some barns, where men were threshing. But these were few: the people were all out in the cabbage plantations. The miry roads lay waste; and waste, too, were the cabin-surroundings. If now and then anyone appeared, a ghost in the fog, he vanished at once, and only the sound of his wooden clogs was audible, as he trudged through the mud. Or from time to time a cart laden with cabbages would roll slowly away from the peat bogs, and scatter the geese wading about to snap up such leaves as it let fall.

The pond struggled within the narrow shores which confined it. It was continually rising; and ere it flooded the lower parts of the road on Boryna's side, it came up to the enclosures, and splashed and foamed before the very cabin-walls.

But the whole village was out, busy cutting the cabbages, and conveying them home. They were housed everywhere, on threshing-floors, in passages, in dwelling-rooms, and in some cases, even under the eaves—bluish-green cabbage-heads were to be seen by hundreds.

They made haste, for it was continually raining, and the ways were all fast becoming sloughs of mire, and impassable.

That day, they were cutting Dominikova's plantation.

Yagna, along with Simon, had been there since morning, for Andrew had stayed at home to mend the roof.

Evening was at hand, and the old housewife again and again came out, looking towards the mill, and listening for the sound of their coming.

But the work was still going on busily in the low-lying plantation beyond the mill. Over the meadows stretched a dense fog; only in places, wide ditches gleamed, full of grey turbid water; and long bands on the higher ground where the cabbages grew, here of a pallid green, there of a rusty red. About these flitted dimly the crimson petticoats of women, piling up heaps of newly cut cabbages.

In the misty distance, close to the river that ran frothing among thickets of brushwood, there rose many a heap of dull brown peat. Here the carts were stationed; they could come no nearer, because of the quaggy nature of the soil, and every sheetful of cabbages had to be taken to them as a bundle carried on the back.

In some fields cutting was over already, and the people were going home; from patch to patch, ever louder and louder, their voices sounded through the fog.

Yagna had only just got through with the work. She was tired out, very sharp-set, and completely drenched to boot. Even her clogs were streaming with wet, for they sank more than ankle-deep into the dun-coloured peaty soil, and she often had to take them off and pour the water out.

"Simon! be quick now! I can feel my limbs no more!" she called out wearily; but, seeing that the young man was unable to lift his burden, she impatiently seized the great bundle, raised it on to her back, and carried it off to the wagon.

"A big fellow like you—yet with the loins of a woman after childbed!" She spoke scornfully, as she poured the cabbages out into the straw at the bottom of the cart.

Simon, much abashed, muttered, growled, scratched his head, and put the horse to.

"Hurry now, Simon!" she cried, swiftly bearing one huge bundle after another to the cart.



But night fell, the shades grew blacker, the rain fell heavier, pouring upon the pulpy ground and into the ditches with a sound as of dropping corn.

"Yuzka! have you done for to-day?" she cried to Boryna's daughter, who had been cutting along with Hanka and Kuba.

"Yes, we have. Time to go home: the weather is frightful, and I am wet through. Are you going too?"

"Aye. It would soon be so dark that we could not find our way. The rest must stand over till to-morrow.—Oh, your cabbages are splendid!" she exclaimed, leaning over towards them, and getting a glimpse of the heaps that loomed through the mist.

"Yours are very good too, and your turnips far larger than ours."

"Ah, they were planted from a new kind of seed, brought from Warsaw by his Reverence."

"Yagna!"—it was Yuzka's voice, calling again to her out of the fog—"do you know, Valek, Joseph's son, is sending people to-morrow to propose to Mary Pociotek?"

"What, that little girl? Is she not too young? Only last year she was herding kine, I think."

"Yes, she is old enough. Besides, she has so many acres that the lads are in haste to marry her."

"You, too, Yuzka, they will be in haste to marry by and by."

"Unless your father takes another wife," shouted Yagustynka from the third field.

"What do you mean?" said Hanka, in a tone of alarm. "He buried her mother only last spring."

"What does that matter to a man? Every one is even as a swine; however full, always ready to thrust his snout into a fresh trough. Ho, ho! one is not quite cold, nay, not yet dead, and the goodman is after another.—They are dogs, all of them. What about Sikora? He took a second wife only three weeks after burying his first."

"True: but then he was left with five little ones."

"As you say. But only a fool can believe he married for

their sake. For his own!—He was fain to share his blanket with someone."

"But," put in Yuzka, with great energy, "that we would not let Father do. Never!"

"Silly baby that you are! The land is your father's own; and so is his will."

"Yet his children too ought to be considered; they have their rights," Hanka rejoined.

"Better to leap into the deep than cumber another man's wagon," Yagustynka muttered.

Yagna, who had taken no part in this talk, smiled to herself as she carried the cabbages. She was reminded of what had happened at the fair.

As soon as the wagon was full, Simon made for the road.

"May God be with you!" Yagna then cried to her neighbours.

"And with you! We are coming directly. . . . Yagna, you'll come to us to pluck off the leaves, won't you?"

"Tell me when, and I'll be there."

"The boys have arranged for music at the Klembas' next Sunday: do you know?"

"I know, Yuzka, I know."

"If you meet Antek," Hanka asked, "pray tell him to hurry. We are waiting."

"All right."

She ran fast to catch the cart, for Simon had started, and could be heard swearing at the horse. The cart had stuck in the mire of the soft peaty ground, and was over the axles in mud; so they both had to work and help the horse past the worst sloughs.

Neither spoke to the other. Simon led the horse, taking care not to let the cart upset, for the way was everywhere full of deep holes. Yagna put her shoulder to the cart behind, considering all the while how she should dress when she went for the leaf-plucking to the Borynas.

It was so dark that the horse was all but invisible. The rain had abated a little, but the fog hung heavy and damp, and the wind blew and whistled above them, lashing the

trees on the embankment which they were now going up.

It was a hard ascent, the ground being both steep and slippery.

"The cart is too full for one horse!" exclaimed a voice on the embankment.

"Is that you, Antek?"

"Surely."

"Then be quick; Hanka is expecting you.—But give us a helping hand now."

"Wait awhile: I must get down first.—It is so dark that you can't see anything."

They were up the embankment in no time, for the helping hand had pushed so powerfully that the horse scrambled up at once, and only came to a halt at the top.

"Thanks most heartily," she said; "but, good God! you *are* strong!"

And she stretched out her hand to shake his.

They were mute. The cart went on before them, while they walked on, side by side, unable to find words, and both of them strangely agitated.

"Are you going back?" she asked in a low whisper.

"I shall only go with you as far as the mill, Yagna; the water has made a nasty hole there."

"Very dark, isn't it?" she said.

"Are you afraid, Yagna?" he murmured, drawing closer.

"Why should I be?"

They were mute again, walking on shoulder to shoulder, side touching side.

"How bright your eyes shine! . . . Like a wolf's."

"Will you come to the Klembas' on Sunday for the music?"

"Will Mother allow me?"

"Do come, Yagna, do come!" he entreated her, in a strangled husky voice.

"Is it your wish?" she asked him softly, looking into his eyes.

"Why, Lord! 'twas I ordered the fiddler from Vola, only for you; and only for you did I beg Klemba to let us have



his cabin." He spoke in a low tone; his face was so close to hers, and his breath came so quick, that she drew back a little, quivering all over with emotion.

"Go now—they are waiting for you—someone may see us.—Go!"

"Will you come?"

"I will—I will," she repeated, turning to look at him as he went away: but the fog had swallowed him up, and she only heard his feet, as they squashed away through the thick slush.

Then an irrepressible shiver seized her; and yet it was a fiery blast that went through her heart and brain. She knew not what it was that had come upon her: her eyes were full of flames; her breath failed her; she could not still the passionate throbbing of her heart. Instinctively she stretched forth her arms as for an embrace: then stiffened herself, taken with so wild a fit of sudden shuddering that she could have cried out aloud. But she reached the wagon and, catching hold, gave it a forward push with great though needless violence. The cart creaked and lurched over, so that several cabbages fell out into the mud. But still she saw before her that face, and ah! those eyes, so bright, so full of ardent craving!

"He is not a man, he's a whirlwind," she mused blankly. "Can there be such another in the whole world?"

She came back to her senses with the noise of the mill they were passing, and with the roar of the water pouring over the wheel and under the sluices; for those, owing to the high level of the water, had been thrown open; with a noisy rush the stream rolled down, breaking up into volumes of yeast-like foam that formed long white streaks on the broad expanse of the river.

At the miller's house, just by the roadside, a lamp had been lit and placed on a table, whence it could be seen through the curtained windows.

"They really have a lamp, just as at his Reverence's or at some manor-house!"

"For are they not rich folk?" said Simon. "They have

more land than Boryna himself; they put their money out at interest; and how they cheat us when they grind our wheat!"

"They live like big landowners. . . . It is well for such as they. . . . They strut about the rooms, they loll upon the sofas, and eat dainty food, and make others work for them." So thought his sister, but without envious feelings, nor paying any heed to what Simon went on saying; who, usually taciturn, now held forth on this subject at interminable length.

At last they arrived. In their bright warm cabin, a fire was blazing merrily on the hearth. Andrew was peeling potatoes, and their mother preparing supper.

Close to the fire sat a hoary-headed old man.

"Is all the work over, Yagna?"

"Only about three sheets full are still to be cut."

She went into the inner room to change, and was back again at once, getting things ready for the meal, all the time keenly and curiously observant of the old man, who sat profoundly silent, looking into the fire, while his lips moved and his rosary passed through his fingers, bead by bead. When they sat down to the meal, the old dame placed a spoon for him, and asked him to eat with them.

"Remain ye with God: I go," he answered. "But I shall look in here again, and perchance make a longer stay at Lipka."

Kneeling down in the centre of the room, he bent before the holy images, crossed himself, and walked out.

"Who is that?" Yagna asked.

"A saintly pilgrim. He comes from the Sepulchre of Jesus. This many a year have I known him. He has been here more than once, and brought me holy things from afar. . . . About three years since . . ."

She was interrupted by the entrance of Ambrose, who, after the usual greetings, took a seat by the fire.

"It is so cold and wet that even my wooden leg feels numb!"

"Why wander so, in such weather, and in the night too?"

Dominikova grumbled. "You had far better have stayed at home and said your prayers."

"At home I was a-weary; so, coming out to see a girl or two, I came first of all to you, Yagna!"

"Death is the name of the only girl for you."

"Oh, *she*! she has forgotten me quite; she prefers dancing with the young."

"What do you mean?" Dominikova asked.

"That his Reverence has just carried the Holy Viaticum to Bartek over the water."

"Why, he was quite well when I saw him but now at the fair!"

"He has been so savagely cudgelled by his son-in-law that his liver was ruptured."

"When? and on what account?"

"On account of the land, of course. They have been at odds these six months, and to-day at noon they settled the matter."

"Why," Yagna cried, "is there no judgment of the Lord upon such murderers?"

"It will come," her mother replied sternly, raising her eyes to the holy images.

"Yes, but it will not bring the dead to life," Ambrose muttered.

"Sit down, and share our board."

"I have naught against that. I still can get through a dish—if only large enough."

"You think of nothing but jesting and drollery."

"I have nought else in the wide world: why should I care!"

They seated themselves round the bench on which the two dishes—potatoes and sour milk—had been put, and set to eating with the usual deliberation and taciturnity, while Andrew saw to the pots' being abundantly supplied. Only Ambrose now and again said something funny, at which he himself was the first to laugh.

"Is his Reverence at home?" Dominikova asked towards the end of the meal.



"Where else, in such weather? Yes, at home, poring over books like a Jew." 13

"A learned, a most learned man!"

"And so good! The best man in the world," Yagna chimed in.

"Ah, yes. No harm in him. . . . Takes care of himself, and hurts nobody."

"That's not the way to speak, Ambrose!"

They had done. Yagna had gone with her mother to where the distaffs were fixed in front of the fire-place, while her brothers, as was their custom, cleared away and washed and set things in order. Dominikova had always ruled her sons with iron sway, and brought them up to do the duties of girls, that Yagna's beautiful hands might not grow coarse.

Ambrose lit his pipe, puffed up the chimney, and poked the embers, while adding some faggots, with furtive glances at the womanfolk. He was pondering over something and settling how to begin.

"I fancy you must have had a proposal or two."

"More."

"Naturally. Yagna is as pretty as a picture. His Reverence says there is none so pretty in the whole village."

"Yagna blushed scarlet with delight.

"Did he say so?" quoth the old dame. "May the Lord grant him health! I have long, long been getting money together for a votive mass: I will have one sung directly."

"There's somebody that would like to send you a proposal; but he is somewhat shy."

"A farm-hand?" Dominikova inquired, turning the spindle swiftly, till it fluttered about the floor.

"A man with a household under him. Comes of a good stock, but is a widower."

"What, nurse another's children? Not I."

"Fear nothing, Yagna; they are all well out of leading-strings."

"Young as she is, why should she accept an old man? Let her wait for a young one, if any such should come."

"Oh, there are plenty. No lack of young men, no! Lads as straight as arrows, smoking cigarettes, dancing in the tavern, swallowing drams of vodka, and with a keen eye for any girl that has a few acres and a bit of money. Wretched husbandmen, though, who rise at noonday, and in the afternoon carry dung in a wheelbarrow, and till the land with a hoe!"

"I will not let my Yagna stoop to any such!"

"They say you are the wisest of us all; and they say true."

"On the other hand—small delight can an old man give a young girl."

"She may find young ones to delight her—not a few."

She eyed him severely. "So reverend in years, yet so careless in talk!"

A pause ensued.

"He's an honourable elder, and not greedy of other folk's money."

"No, no! naught but sin can come of it!"

"Well, but he might make a marriage settlement," he continued, now quite serious, and knocking the ashes out of his pipe.

The reply, when it came, was given with hesitation.

"Yagna has enough of her own."

"He would give more than what he received; certainly more."

"What's that you say?"

"What I know. Neither the wind nor my fancy has taught it me: I come here in another's name."

Silence again. The old housewife took a long time to straighten the tangled flax on the distaff; then, wetting her left thumb and finger, she drew out the long fibres, while her right set the spindle whirling, flapping and whirring along the floor like a top.

"Well then, shall he send her his friends with vodka?"

"He? Who?"

"Know you not? He that dwells over there!" And Ambrose pointed to the lights in Boryna's hut, twinkling across the pond.

"His family are grown up: they will oppose it. Besides, they have a right to their portions."

"But he can always make a settlement with what is his own! He is a good man, and no indifferent farmer; religious into the bargain. And hale! Lord, I have seen the man heave more than two bushels of rye in a sack on to his shoulders. Let your Yagna wish for anything in the world except pigeon's milk, and she will get it. And then, the lad Andrew is next year to be a conscript. Now, Boryna knows all about official matters, and whom to apply to, and may be of great use."

"But how do you, Yagna, look upon this?"

"Indifferently.—If you say: 'Marry him' I will. It is for you, not for me, to decide." She spoke very low, her forehead touching her distaff, while, looking vacantly into the fire, she listened as the faggots crackled merrily.

"Well?" Ambrose queried, rising from his seat.

"Let his friends come"; the words dropped one by one from the old dame's lips. "A betrothal is not a wedding yet."

Ambrose crossed himself and went out, making straight for Boryna's cabin.

Yagna was sitting dumb and motionless.

"Yagna dearest, what do you say to this?"

"Naught whatever; it is all the same to me. If you like, I marry Boryna; if not, I stay with you. . . . By your side, I am very well off."

Her mother spoke in subdued tones as she went on spinning:

"I would fain do all for the best, my dear. True, he is old, but strong and hearty still. And, besides, he will treat you courteously, not as other peasants might do. You will be the mistress and the head of his house. Also, when he makes the settlement, I shall arrange matters so that the land he will leave to us will touch ours. . . . And then, were the amount only six acres—think of it, Yagna! six acres more!—And then remember: you must marry, you *must*! Why should the tongues of all the village gossips



wag to defame you? . . . We should have to kill the pig . . ." Here she broke off, and went on to settle other matters within herself; for Yagna was spinning mechanically, as if she had heard nothing said.

Was she, she mused, unhappy at her mother's? She did what she liked; no one ever said a cross word to her. Acres, settlement, possessions, nay, even a husband—what did she care for them all? Were the lads who sought her few in number? Had she a mind, she could bring them all to propose to her the same evening. . . . Her mind was little by little being made up, as was the flaxen thread she span; and as that thread turned in one direction only, so she determined on one thing—to marry Boryna, if her mother cared for the marriage.—Yes; she liked him better than the rest: had he not bought her a ribbon and a kerchief?—True; yet Antek, and others as well, if they owned Boryna's money, would do as much for her.—No, no: let her mother choose, whose head was good at such things: her own was not.

She looked towards the window, where the withered and blackened dahlia bushes were tapping, lashed by the gale. By and by she forgot them, forgot everything, forgot her very self, and fell into a state of beatific inertness like that which now held the earth around her in those deathly quiet nights of autumn. For Yagna's soul was even as that earth; as that earth, it had its abysses, dreamy, chaotic, known to none. Vast it was, but unconscious of its own vastness; mighty, yet without either will or desire or longing—inanimate, yet immortal; like that earth, too, swept by every blast that took hold of her, and seized upon her, and did with her whatsoever it listed. . . . And likewise, in the springtime, the warm sun would awake her, and flood her with life, and fill her with the quivering flame of desire and love; and like the earth, her soul would conceive—it could do naught else; would live and sing, rule, create, and annihilate its creations—it could do naught else; it would exist—it could not but exist! Such was that hallowed earth; such was the soul of Yagna, like unto that same earth.

Long did she sit thus, mute: only those eyes of hers were glittering as still waters at noon in spring, or as gleam the stars.

Suddenly she awoke from her reverie: someone had opened the front door. It was Yuzka, who rushed breathless into the room.

Shaking the water out of her clogs, she said: "Yagna, we have the leaf-plucking to-morrow: will you come?"

"Of course."

"We shall do the work in the big room. Ambrose is sitting there now with father, so I made shift to slip out and let you know. There will be Ulisia, and Mary, and Vitka, and all the other Pociotek girls. Lads will be there too. Peter has promised to come and bring his fiddle."

"Peter? Who is that?"

"The son of Michael who dwells beyond the Voyt's house. He that returned from the army when potato-digging began, and talks so queerly now, one can scarce understand what he says."<sup>1</sup>

After chattering on in this way, she ran off home.

Again the room was plunged in silence.

The raindrops pattered on the window-panes, like handfuls of sand thrown upon them. The wind roared and played about the garden, or blew down the chimney, till the brands on the hearthstone were scattered about, and whiffs of smoke came into the room. But the spindles never ceased from whirring about the floor.

Thus the long evening dragged on tediously, until Yagna's mother began to sing in a faint, quavering voice:

"May all that we this day have done . . .";

Yagna and her brothers taking up the hymn in so high-pitched a key that the fowls roosting in the passage clucked and cackled in chorus.

<sup>1</sup> Four years in the Russian army, often in the very depths of Russia, were wont to make havoc with a Polish peasant's mother-tongue.—*Translator's Note.*

## CHAPTER VII

THE next day was as rainy and dreary as the one before.

Every now and then, someone would come out of a hut to peer anxiously into a mist-blurred world, and see if it was clearing up a little. And nothing met the eye but the slate-coloured clouds, so low that they touched the very tree-tops. And the rain rained on.

The folk were cooped up in the cabins, and getting out of sorts. One or two went out through the mud and rain to a neighbour's, lamenting that So-and-so had left his cattle-litter in the forest, not having been able to remove it; that another had not yet brought in his firewood; that many, almost all, had cabbages in the ground still, and could not now go to cut them, because the pond had risen so much during the night that the sluices had been perforce opened, and the water let out into the river; which consequently had swollen very greatly and the meadows were flooded, and all the cabbage plantations like sombre islands amid the drab and foaming swirl.

Nor had Dominikova been able to get home the cabbages she had afield.

Ever since morning, Yagna was feeling greatly upset, heaving sighs of vexation as she went from corner to corner, and looked out of the window at the dahlia bushes, now beaten to the ground by the flood, and at the whole dripping landscape.

"Good Lord, how weary I am!" she said, impatiently awaiting the close of day and the start for Boryna's cabin. The hours crawled by, like an old man trudging in the mud—so sluggishly, so wearily, so drearily, that it became intolerable. She grew very restless, and was continually



scolding her brothers, and flinging about such articles as she happened to find at hand. Withal, her head began to ache, and she had to put a warm oatmeal poultice, sprinkled with vinegar, on the top of her head, before it passed off. But, though now better, she felt completely out of gear; her work fell from her hands, and she many a time cast her eyes upon that surging pond which, like some huge bird, spread out ponderous wings, and flapped them, and struggled up, foaming, till the water rose and splashed all over the road—and all but soared into the air.

Dominikova had been out since the morning, called away to attend a woman in child-bed at the farther end of the village; for she knew a good deal about medicine, and how to heal various ailments.

So then Yagna was feeling very ill at ease. She longed to go out of doors and see someone; but whenever she tied her apron over her head and peered out beyond the threshold at the mire and the downpour, her desire vanished away. At last, knowing not what to do with herself, she opened her chest and took out all her holiday apparel, which she spread upon the beds, till the room glowed crimson with striped skirts and jackets and aprons. But that day she cared nothing for any of them. At all those her possessions she gazed with tired indifferent eyes; nevertheless, she drew Boryna's gifts—the kerchief and the ribbon—from the bottom of the chest, and adorning herself with them, took a look at the glass.

"They will do. I shall put them on this evening," she decided; but took them off again hurriedly, for someone was coming to the hut, creeping along by the fence.

This was no other than Matthew. Yagna cried out in astonishment as he came in: the very man on whose account the village folk had talked most against her as having met him by night in the orchard and elsewhere many a time. He was a man rather beyond the prime of life, being well over thirty; still a bachelor, for he did not care to marry, having sisters at home (or rather, according to Yagstynka's malicious tongue, because lasses and neighbours'

wives were very much to his liking); a tall fellow, strong as an oak, very sure of himself, and consequently so proud and headstrong that he was feared by almost everyone. And he could—what could he not do?—play the flute, construct a wagon, build a hut, arrange a stove; and whatever he did, he did so well that his hands were always full of work. Never of money, though: however much he earned, he would get rid of it directly, drinking, standing drinks, and lending to his friends. He was called "Dove," though in his eyes and his fiery nature he had much more of the hawk.

"Matthew!"

"Yes, 'tis I, Yagna!"

He seized both her hands, and riveted his eyes on hers with a glance of such passionate eagerness that she turned red, and looked uneasily towards the door.

"You have been away these six months," she stammered.

"Six, and twenty-three days besides, is the true reckoning." He did not drop her hand.

"I shall get a light!" she cried; for it was really getting dark, and she wanted to free her hands.

"Give me a greeting, Yagna!" he begged, in a whisper, and tried to put his arm round her waist. She slipped away, and ran to the fire-place to kindle a light, fearing lest her mother should find her in the dark with Matthew. He, however, was too quick, caught her, squeezed her close, and set to kissing her with wild impetuosity.

She struggled like a snared bird, but could not free herself from the ravenous creature that hugged her till her ribs cracked and showered upon her such mad kisses that she grew faint; a veil dimmed her eyes, and she could not breathe.

"Matthew, good Matthew, please let me go!"

"Yet awhile, Yagna, yet again . . . for I am frantic!" And he kissed till the girl drooped and sank limp in his arms, weak as water. But at that moment he heard steps in the passage; so he let her go, lit a hand-lamp at the fire-place, and rolled a cigarette, looking the while at Yagna with eyes that sparkled with delight.



Andrew came in, blew the fire on the hearth into a blaze, and pottered about the room; so they said but little, those two, whilst exchanging hot glances of hungry, starving desire all the time.

A few minutes later, Dominikova came in. She must have been vexed at something or other, for she began by rating Simon soundly in the passage. Seeing Matthew, she darted a fierce look at him, paid no heed to his greeting, and went into the bedroom to change her dress.

"Go away," Yagna begged, "or mother will curse you when she comes."

But he only implored her to come out and meet him.

Dominikova entered. "You . . . you! Back again?" she asked, as if she had not seen him before.

"Yes, back again, Mother," he answered gently, trying to kiss her hand.

"Am I a cur, that you call me mother?" she snarled, snatching her hand away angrily. "Why do you come? Once for all, I have said you are not wanted here."

"I come, not for you, but for Yagna," he answered, with a defiant air: he was losing his temper.

"You're to drop Yagna for good, I say! Drop her! Folks shall not again defame her on your account! . . . Off, and out of my sight, you . . . !"

"Why croak so loud? All the village will hear!"

"Let them hear! Let them come! Let them know that you are sticking to Yagna as a burr sticks to a dog's tail—that we need an ovenrake to drive you from us!"

"Oh, that you were a man! How you would smart for this!"

"Try then, hound that you are! Just try, you ruffian, you bully!" And with those words she grasped the poker.

This brought the scene to an end. Matthew spat furiously on the ground and went out instantly, slamming the door. For how could he make a laughing-stock of himself by coming to blows with a woman?

Thereupon the beldame turned to Yagna, to vent her fury on her. With what upbraidings did she fall upon the girl,



and discharge her soul of the gall she was bursting with! At first Yagna sat dumbstruck and petrified with dismay; but soon her mother's bitter words stung her to the quick. She hid her face in the bed she was sitting by, and burst into tears and lamentations. She was cut to the heart. . . . What wrong had she done? . . . She had not even asked him in: he had come by himself. . . . Mother had reminded her of last spring. . . . Well . . . he had met her at the stile. . . . How could she get away from so impetuous a fire-drake, when a fit of faintness came over her so? . . . And after that . . . how could she keep him off? Impossible! . . . It was always the case with her: when a man looked deep into her eyes, or embraced her with a powerful hug . . . then all within her trembled, and her strength forsook her, and her inwards swooned away, and she knew nothing more. Was she in any wise to blame for this?

These complaints she uttered in a choking voice, between bursts of tears; and at last her mother, softening towards her, wiped her face and eyes with tender care, and stroked her tresses, and soothed her.

"Come, come, Yagna; be calm: do not weep. Why, your eyes will look like a rabbit's: and how will you be able to go to Boryna's then?"

"Is't time to go now?" she asked after a while, a little comforted.

"It is.—Now dress and array yourself.—There will be many there, and even Boryna will notice you."

Yagna instantly rose and prepared to deck herself out.

"Shall I boil some milk for you?"

"I have no mind at all to eat, Mother dear."

"Simon! you hulking oaf! Warming yourself at the fire, indeed—and the kine gnawing at the empty mangers!" she cried, exhaling the last of her anger on the lad, who fled in bodily fear.

"'Tis my mind," she remarked, helping Yagna dress, "that the blacksmith has been reconciled with Boryna: I met him leading a calf home from the old man's farm.—A pity! 'twas worth fifteen roubles at least. And yet it

may be as well that they agree together; for the smith has a dangerous tongue, and knows the law besides. . . ." She stepped back, and looked lovingly at her daughter. "Alas! they have let that thief Koziol out of jail already; and now we shall have to watch, and lock every door well."

Yagna set off; but for some distance on her way she heard her mother inveighing against Andrew for leaving the swine out of their sties, and letting the fowls roost in the trees.

Many people were already at Boryna's when she arrived.

The fire was leaping up the chimney, lighting the big room, making the glazed picture-frames glisten, and giving a semblance of motion to the many globes made of coloured wafers that dangled from the grimy, smoke-blackened rafters. In the middle there lay a heap of cabbages, round which, in a wide semicircle, with faces turned towards the hearth, a good many girls and some women of maturer age sat side by side, stripping the cabbages of their outer and withered leaves, and throwing them on to a great sheet that was spread out under the window.

Having warmed her hands at the fire, Yagna took her clogs off, and at once sat down to work at the end of the row, next to old Yagustynka.

The room soon grew noisier, more men and women coming in: some of the former, together with Kuba, helping to bring the cabbages in from the barn, but for the most part only smoking cigarettes and grinning at the lasses, or cracking jokes together.

Yuzka, though hardly in her teens as yet, presided over the work and the fun; for old Boryna had not come home, and Hanka was as usual flitting about everywhere like a moth.

"Why, the room glows like a field of red poppies!" exclaimed Antek, who, having rolled several barrels into the passage, had now set the cabbage-cutter by the fire, but a little on one side.

"Bah! they are dressed up as though for a wedding!" remarked an elderly woman.



"And Yagna looks as if she had been washed in milk," Yagustynka said, in a spiteful tone.

"Let me be, will you?" the girl whispered, flushing deeply.

"Rejoice, O ye lasses," the old woman continued; "for Matthew is back from his wanderings. And now will the time begin for music, and dancing, and trysts in the orchards!"

"He has been absent all the summer."

"Yes; building a farm-house at Vola."

"A grand master-builder: could build a castle in the air," said one of the farm-hands.

"And achieve a bantling in less than nine months," observed Yagustynka.

"Always speaking against somebody, you are!" one of the girls protested.

"Take heed lest I choose to speak of you!" was the retort.

"Have you heard them say the old wanderer has come to Lipka again?"

"He will be with us to-night," Yuzka boasted.

"He was away for three years."

"Yes, at the Holy Sepulchre."

"Fiddlesticks! Who saw him there? He lies like a gipsy, and only fools believe him. Just like the smith, telling us what he has read in the papers about foreign parts."

"Do not say that, Yagustynka. His Reverence himself told Mother that the man was there."

"Ah, we all know that Dominikova's other home is the priest's house, and whenever his Reverence has a stomach-ache, she knows all about it."

Yagna said not a word, but would have loved to knife the old hag, for her gibe was the signal of a burst of laughter. But just then Ulisia, Gregory's wife, leaned over towards Klembova and asked her whence the man was.

"Whence? From far away; where, no man can tell." She stooped to take up another cabbage, and as she cut off the old leaves, said in a louder tone, so that all might hear her: "Every third winter he comes to Lipka, and takes up



his quarters with Boryna. Roch is the name he chooses to go by; but it certainly is not his. He is a *Dziad*, and yet no *Dziad*: what he really is, who knows? But a good and religious man, that he is no doubt; he only needs a halo round his head to be just like a saint in a picture. Round his neck he wears a rosary that has touched the sepulchre of our Lord. He gives the children holy images, and also—to some of them—pictures of the kings who once ruled our country. He has prayer-books besides, and other books that tell about everything in the world. . . . He was reading some of them to our Valek. We listened too, my husband and I: but the things were hard to make out, and I have forgotten them. . . . And so pious! Half the day, he is on his knees; and then again before the crucifix, or out in the fields; he never goes to church but for mass. His Reverence asked Roch to stay with him, but his answer was:

“My place is with the common people, and not in chambers.”

“Everybody knows he is not a peasant, though he speaks as we do. And how learned he is! He can jabber in German with a Jew; and at the manor of Djazgova, where dwells a young lady who was in a warm country for her health, he spoke with her in an outlandish tongue!—Nor will he take aught from any man, save a drop of milk or a morsel of bread: and he teaches our children besides. They say . . .”—Here she was interrupted by a great burst of laughter that made the company hold their sides.

The cause was Kuba, who had been bringing cabbages in a sheet and, receiving a push, had fallen sprawling on the floor, all the cabbages rolling about the room. He tried to rise, but as soon as he began to scramble up, another push sent him down again.

Yuzka took his part, and came to help him up at last; but he was exasperated, and uttered fearful language.

But the interest turned to other matters presently. All spoke at once, and this—though no one spoke loudly—made a hubbub as in a hive before swarming-time; and there were peals of merriment, and banter; and eyes flashed, and

tongues waxed bold, and the work went on swifter and swifter. The knives rattled upon the stalks, the cabbages fell into the sheet like a running fire of cannon-balls: every moment the heap rose higher. Antek was using the cabbage-cutter over a big barrel rolled close to the fire—undressed, save for his shirt and the striped drawers that he wore, flushed, dishevelled, streaming with perspiration, and yet so handsome that Yagna feasted her eyes on his picturesque form. From time to time he paused to take breath; and then he would look at her, and she would cast her eyes down and blush. This, however, was noticed by none save Yagustynka, who pretended to have seen nothing, whilst taking thought how best to spread the news about the village.

"They say Martianna is confined," Klembova said.

"That's no news, but a yearly thing."

"The woman's an aurochs! But for the babies she has, she would certainly get a stroke!" Yagustynka grumbled, and would have gone on, had not the others rebuked her for talking of such things in the presence of girls.

"Fear not for them," she replied. "They know a good deal more than that already. In these days, you cannot speak to a goose-boy about the stork, but he will laugh in your face. No, no, it was otherwise of old times."

"Well, you at any rate knew everything when you were a cow-herd," said Vavrek's old wife, very gravely. "Have I forgotten all you did when tending cattle?"

"If you have not, then keep it to yourself!" cried Yagustynka, with wrathful asperity.

"I was then already married. Let me see: with Matthew? No, with Michael; Vavrek was my third," she muttered, not quite clear as to the date of the old hag's youthful frailties.

Here Nastusia, Matthew's sister, burst breathless into the room, crying out: "What, are you all sitting here, and know ye not what has befallen?"

Questioned on every side, and with every eye fixed on



her: "Why," she said, "the miller's horses have been stolen!"

"When?"

"But two minutes ago. Our Matthew has just heard of it from Yankel."

"Yankel always knows of this sort of things from the first—and perhaps a little before, too."

"They were taken out of the stables. The farm-servant went to the mill to get provender; and when he came back, the stable was bare, both of horses and harness! And the dog was found poisoned in its kennel."

"Winter is coming on, and strange things happen in winter."

"Because there is really no punishment at all for thieves. Why, what do they get? A warm prison cell, food in plenty, and so much to learn from their fellow-thieves that, when they get out, they know twice as much, and are twice as bad."

"Oh, but if anyone should steal my horses, and I got hold of him, I would kill him on the spot like a mad dog!" cried one of the farm-hands.

"Only fools look for justice in this world. Anyone who can, may right his own wrongs."

"Should such a one be caught by a great number of men and killed, these surely could not be punished: impossible to punish all of them!"

"I remember," said Vavrek's wife, "something in that way, done here amongst us. . . . I had then my second husband—no, let me see; Matthew was yet living then . . ."

Her reminiscences were cut short by the entrance of Boryna.

"Oh," he cried in a merry mood, "the noise of your chattering can be heard across the water!" and taking off his cap, he greeted each guest, one after another. Possibly he was already slightly elevated, being as red as a beetroot; and contrary to his custom, he unbuttoned his capote, and talked loud and long. He greatly wished to come over and sit by



Yagna, but durst not: it would never do, so long as things had not been settled between them. So he only enjoyed the looks of her—so comely, so well dressed—adorned, too, with the kerchief he had bought for her!

Vitek and Kuba brought a long bench and set it in front of the fire. And Yuzka, having wiped it with a clean linen cloth, at once set on it the necessary dishes and spoons for supper.

Out of the pantry Boryna brought a big-bellied bottle, containing four quarts of vodka, and went round drinking to each visitor, and with him.

The girls, however, hung back with affected dislike, until one of the farm-hands cried out: "They're all as fond of vodka as a cat of milk, but just hold off for the look of the thing!"

"The hopeless drunkard! Always at Yankel's, he thinks everyone is like him!"

So they held off no more, but drank, first turning away and putting their hands before their faces, then throwing the last drops on to the floor, with due rites; and each made a wry face and exclaimed: "How very strong!" as she returned the glass to Boryna.

Yagna alone refused to drink, however much she was asked.

"I do not so much as know how vodka tastes, and I do not care to know."

"Well, now, sit down, dear friends, and partake of what we have for you," was Boryna's invitation, after the vodka.

Several formalities, commanded by good breeding, having been gone through, they all seated themselves to eat deliberately and engage in conversation.

The food was so very excellent as to surprise many of the guests. There were boiled potatoes, served in broth; there was sodden meat, with barley meal; there was cabbage together with peas in one dish: all offered with great hospitality on the part of the master, who not only invited, but pressed his visitors to enjoy themselves.

Vitek heaped the fire with dry roots, which made a joyful

crackling noise; and while they were eating, Kuba brought in a heap of fresh cabbages, which he piled up, greedily sniffing the dainties on the table, and sighing.

"Those creatures!" he grumbled to himself; "all eating away like starved horses! Very likely they will not leave a man as much as a bone to gnaw!"

Presently, however, the meal was over, and all stood up to say "God reward you!" to the founder of the feast.

"May it do you good!" was the set reply.

A few minutes of unrest ensued, during which some went out to take a little air and stretch their limbs, some to see whether the sky was clearing up; and the farm-hands, to stand about the porch and chaff the girls.

And then Kuba sat down upon the threshold, with a dish on his lap, and gorged himself with such an intensity of appetite that he did not so much as notice the dog Lapa, notwithstanding its gentle hints; and Lapa, finding it would get nothing in that quarter, made for the passage reserved for the other dogs that had come with the guests and were gnawing the bones thrown to them by Yuzka.

They were about to fall to work again, when Roch appeared upon the threshold, and "praised Jesus Christ."

"World without end!" was the reply of all.

"See ye come not too late, but when food's on the plate," Boryna quoted.

"Let Yuzka but give me some bread and milk; 'twill do."

"There's some meat remaining still," said Hanka, timidly.

"No, thanks; I never eat meat."

At first, all were silent, staring at him with friendly curiosity; but when he sat down to eat, they soon again fell a-talking and a-laughing.

Yagna alone eyed the old pilgrim again and again, with wondering looks, surprised that such a one, not unlike other men, should have visited the tomb of Christ our Lord, and gone over half the world, and seen so many a marvel. What was it like, then, the great world he knew? Where should one go, to arrive at it? Around her there were only hamlets and fields and pine-forests, beyond which again



stretched fields and pine-forests and hamlets. One must go a hundred leagues, or perhaps a thousand, she thought. She was strangely drawn to put some questions to the man; but how could she? The folk would only laugh at her.

Rafal's son, who had just come back from the army, had brought his fiddle; and now, having tuned it, began to play one tune after another. Silence came over the room; only the rain was heard, pattering upon the panes, and the voices of the dogs whining outside.

He played and played on, ever some new tune, drawing his bow across the strings, and the melody seemed to come forth by itself at its caressing touch. First he played religious tunes, as though in honour of the pilgrim, who never took his eyes off the young man. Then came other and quite worldly airs; for instance, the one about "Johnny has gone to the wars," which the girls were used to sing in the fields so often; and he drew the notes out with such infinite sadness that an icy shudder ran down one's spine; and Yagna, who was sensitive to music as are but few, felt tears, one after another, trickling down her cheeks.

"Oh, do leave off!" Nastka called out. "You are making Yagna cry."

"No, no; I always feel tearful when there is music," Yagna whispered, covering her face with her apron.

But she could not help the tears that flowed against her will, called forth by the strange yearning which she felt within her—and for what? She knew not.

The young fellow went on playing; only the fiddle now poured out riotous Mazurs and such lively Obertas that the girls could scarce remain seated, but must perforce squeeze their restless quivering knees together to do so, while the boys stamped merrily and hummed the tunes, and the whole room was in a tumult of noise and laughter, and the very window-panes were shaking.

On a sudden, a dog in the passage set up a lamentable howl, a howl so piercing that on the spot the room became as still as death.

"What is that?"



Roch had dashed out so suddenly that he had narrowly missed falling over the cabbage-cutter.

"No great thing," Antek cried, after a look into the passage; "some lad has been squeezing a dog's tail in the doorway."

"Vitek's work, I make no doubt," Boryna said.

Yuzka defended the boy most earnestly: "What, Vitek cruel to a dog? Never!"

Roch now returned, very greatly agitated. He had probably let the dog loose, for it was heard outside, whining close to the fence.

"A dog, too, is God's creature," he said excitedly, "and it suffers when ill-treated, as does any man. Our Lord also had a dog of His own, and suffered no one to use it ill."

"What? The Lord Jesus had a dog, just as men have?" queried Yagustynka the doubter.

"I tell you that He had; and Burek was its name."

The statement was received with a chorus of exclamations: "Well-a-day!—How now? Can this be!" and so on.

Roch was silent for a while; then, raising his hoary head, covered with long hair save in front, where it was cut straight and short over the forehead, and fixing upon the fire those eyes out of which the colour seemed to have been washed by many a tear, he began to speak slowly, his beads slipping meanwhile through his fingers.

"In those far-off bygone times, when Jesus our Lord yet walked upon this earth, and ruled over the nations in His own Person, the thing of which I shall tell you came to pass.

"Now, Jesus was going to the local feast in the parish of Mstov. And there was no road thither, but the way was through desolate burning sands only; and the sun beat hot upon them, and the air was even as when a storm is nigh at hand.

"Nor was there any shade or shelter anywhere.

"Our Lord walked on patiently; but though He was not yet near the forest, His holy feet were quite numb with weary travel, and He felt exceeding great thirst. Therefore did he again and again stop to rest on some hillock upon the

way: albeit the heat there was still greater, and there was not enough shadow from the few dry stalks of mullein for even a fowl of the air to find shelter.

"But when He had seated Himself, it was hard for Him, without air to breathe; for lo, immediately the Evil One—as a foul goshawk swooping down on some weary little bird—would swoop down, beating up the sand with his hoofs, and wallowing therein as would some unclean beast; and a cloud of sand arose, hiding all things from sight in darkness.

"Now Our Lord, although He neither could well breathe, nor indeed move (so dark it was), rose up and walked on, only laughing to scorn the foolish one, the fiend who would make Him lose His way, so that He might not be there at the local feast to save the sinful people.

"And Jesus walked and walked, until He came to the forest.

"There, in the shadow, He rested somewhat, and refreshed Himself with water, and with that which was in His scrip. . . . Then, breaking off a bough for a staff, He crossed Himself, and entered the forest.

"Now, that forest was most ancient and thick, with great fastnesses of deep mire, and matted tangles of undergrowth and dense brushwood, almost impervious even for a bird, wherein the Evil One himself surely did dwell. Yet Jesus entered thither.

"Whereupon, what did the fiend not do? He shook the forest, and howled, and broke in twain the great branches with the help of the blast, as his wicked attendant aiding him all it could; blowing the oak-trees down, tearing the branches off, and roaring through the forest like one mad!

"Moreover, it grew dark, blindingly dark, and on this side there was a hubbub, and on that side a din, and on the other a whirlwind. And round about Jesus there ran hellish imps, leaping, showing their long teeth, glaring and snarling, and all but clutching at Him with their claws. Only that they durst not do, for the awe they had of Christ's most sacred Person.

"But when our Lord grew weary of all those foolish hob-



goblins, being in haste to arrive at the local feast, He made the sign of the Cross over them—and behold, all the evil spirits with their impish helpers straightway disappeared in the brushwood.

“And lo, there remained only one wild dog; for in those days the dog had not yet become the friend of man.

“This dog therefore fled not, but, running after our Lord, barked at Him; and following after, it tore at His capote, and snapped at His scrip, and would fain have seized the meat which was therein. . . . But our Lord, being merciful, and unwilling to harm any of His creatures, said unto it:

“‘Silly one, hungry one, behold! here is meat for thee!’ And He threw it some, which He took from out of His scrip.

“But the dog waxed still more angry, and in its fury it bared its teeth and, snarling, attacked our Lord, and tore the hose which He was wearing.

“‘I gave bread unto thee; I harmed thee not: and yet thou tearest My garments, and barkest to no avail? Thou art foolish, thou little dog of mine, that thou knowest not thy Master! Because thou hast done this, shalt thou be the servant of man, and helpless without him evermore.’

“When our Lord had said this, speaking in a loud voice, the dog sat down on its hind quarters; and then, stupefied, with its tail between its legs, it went away into the wide world.

“Now, at the local feast, there were many, many people, thick as the blades of grass on the meadows.

“Only the church was empty. They were carousing in the taverns, and had set up a great fair in the church cloisters, with drinking and lechery, and sins against God, such as do happen even in our days.

“Our Lord arrived when High Mass was over. He saw the people agitated like the corn in the breeze, and running to and fro, some striking with whips, some pulling stakes out of the fences, and others seeking for stones; and the women were screaming and rushing to scramble over the hedges, or into their carts; and the children wept.



"They all were shouting aloud: 'Lo, a mad dog! a mad dog!'

"And through the waves of the people the dog sped on, for all made way for it to pass: so, with tongue lolling out, it darted straight towards the Lord Jesus.

"Our Lord feared it not, and He knew that it was the dog from the forest; and He doffed His capote, speaking unto the dog; and it straightway went no further.

"'Come hither, Burek,' He said; 'here, by My side, thou shalt be safer than ever thou wast in the forest.'

"He covered it with His capote, and spread His hands out over it, and said:

"'Kill it not, O men: for behold, it is a creature of God, wretched and hungry, hunted and without a master.'

"Howbeit the peasants began to cry aloud, murmuring, and striking with their staves upon the earth.

"'It was a wild and savage beast; it had carried away many geese and lambs of theirs, and never ceased from doing evil. Nor did it reverence man at all, but snapped at him with its fangs, so that none could go abroad, unless he bore a stick. Wherefore it must needs be slain.'

"But Jesus waxed wroth, and cried:

"'Let no one stir!—O ye drunkards, ye fear a dog, and ye fear not the Lord your God?'

"They then shrank back, for He had spoken with a mighty voice. And then He said further that they were evil-doers, who had come to gain the indulgence, and did but drink in the taverns, and offend God, and repented them not; men accursed, ungodly, thieves and torturers one of another; but they should not escape the judgments of God!

"And having ended these words, the Lord Jesus took up His staff, and made as if to depart.

"But the people now knew who He was, and knelt down before Him, and cried out and wept with great lamentations, saying: 'Abide with us, abide, O Lord Jesus! and we will be faithful unto Thee, we drunkards, we ungodly ones, we evil-doers—only abide with us! Punish us, smite us, but forsake us not, helpless orphans, a masterless people!'

And they wept so sore, and begged so earnestly, kissing His sacred hands and feet, that His heart softened towards them, and He remained the space of a few prayers, teaching and shriving and blessing them all.

"And when He departed from among them, He said: 'Hath the dog done any harm to you? Lo, it will henceforward be your servant, and watch over the geese and drive your sheep: and if one or another of you shall sleep, having drunk over much, it shall be the guardian of your little holdings, and your friend.

"'Only do ye treat it with kindness, nor do it any wrong.'

"So Jesus went forth, and left them. And looking round, He saw Burek, sitting where He had stood by its side to defend it.

"'Wilt thou come with Me, Burek, or abide here in thy foolishness?'

"And thereupon the dog rose up; and thenceforth it always followed Jesus, as quiet, as faithful, as watchful as the best of servants could be.

"And from that time forth, they were always together.

"And if at any time a famine came over the land, the dog would catch a small bird, or a gosling, or a lambkin; so that they both had wherewithal to live.

"Ofttimes also, when Jesus was tired, and rested Himself, Burek would drive away wicked men and evil beasts, and not let them hurt Jesus.

"But when it came to pass that the vile Jews and their cruel Pharisees seized our Lord to put Him to death, then Burek flew at them all, poor loving creature! and defended Him, using its teeth as it could.

"But Jesus, stooping beneath the Tree which He was bearing for His sacred Passion, said unto Burek:

"'Thou canst do no good: and behold, their consciences will bite them deeper than thy teeth!'

"And when they hanged Him on the bitter Cross, Burek sat beside it, and did howl.

"Now, the next day, when all men had departed, and neither His blessed Mother, nor His holy Apostles were



there, Burek alone abode by His side, and licked again and again the sacred dying feet of our Lord, pierced through with nails; and it howled, and howled, and howled.

"And when the third day rose, Jesus awoke from His swoon, and looked; and no one was nigh Him beside the Cross, save only Burek, whining pitifully, and fawning at His feet.

"Then did Christ Jesus, our most Holy Lord, look mercifully upon it in that hour, and say with His last dying breath:

"Come with me, Burek!

. . . . .

"And the dog at that very instant did breathe its last, and follow its Lord!

"Amen.

"All this came to pass as I have said, O dearly beloved," Roch concluded, pleasantly; and, making the sign of the cross, he passed over to the other lodgings, where Hanka had prepared him a corner to sleep in; for he was very tired.

There was dead silence through the room for a time. All were pondering over that strange fantastic story. Some of the girls—Yagna, Yuzka, and Nastka amongst them—stealthily brushed their tears away; for their emotions had been strongly excited, both by the doom of Christ, and by the part played in it by the dog Burek. Also, the very fact that there had been a dog upon earth better and more faithful to our Lord than men were, gave them all much matter for reflection. Slowly, and at first under their breath, they began to make various comments upon so wonderful a Divine ordinance; when Yagustynka, who all the time had listened with great attention, lifted up her head, and said with a sneer:

"Fiddle-de-dee, fiddle-de-dee!—One fable and two make three! I'll tell you a far better tale: how a man made an ox.



"Of old the steer,  
Not the ox, was made;  
But a man took a blade—  
Lo, the ox is here!"

"My tale is at least as true as Roch's," she said, with a burst of laughter. Those about her laughed likewise, and presently the room was full of jokes, and funny sayings and tales of all sorts.

"Ah, there's nothing that Yagustynka does not know!"

"She has learned, she has learned; has she not buried three husbands?"

"Oh, yes: the first taught her in the morning with a whip; the second at noon with a strap; and the third in the evening with a cudgel!" Rafal cried.

"And a fourth would I take, but not you: too stupid a hobbledohy for me!"

Here one of the young men observed: "As our Lord's dog could not do without men, so women cannot do without beating: the want of that is what makes Yagustynka so spiteful."

"You're a fool," she retorted, with a fierce snarl. "Just you take heed no one sees you, when you steal your father's corn for Yankel; let widows alone, they are beyond your understanding!"—Everyone was silent, fearing lest she might, in a fit of anger, tell all she possibly might know. Indeed, she was a most stiff-necked woman, who held her own opinion on every matter, and would often utter such words as made men's flesh creep, and their hair stand on end. She had respect for no one, not even for the priest and the Church. His Reverence had more than once admonished her, but without effect: nay, she even talked about his rebukes in the village.

"Oh, without any priest we can all manage with God, if we are but honest folk!—Let him rather take more heed of his housekeeper: she is with child for the third time, and will soon be dropping it somewhere, as she did before."

Such was her character.

When they were about to separate, the Voyt came in with the Soltys, giving orders that the peasants should go next day to work at repairing the road by the mill: it had been damaged by the rains. No sooner had the Voyt come in than he exclaimed, stretching out both arms:

"Why, the old boy has invited all the prettiest girls in the village!"

And so he had: all were of the best stock, and robust and blooming,

The Voyt had a private talk with old Boryna, but no one could catch what they said. He withdrew, after a few words of banter with the lasses, having still half the village to summon for the morrow. They too departed soon after, it being late.

Boryna said farewell to each one in particular, and even saw the elder women to the gate.

Yagustynka, on leaving, raised her voice, and said:

"God bless you for your good cheer; but all was not as it might have been."

"Indeed?"

"You need someone to keep house for you, Matthias: without such a one, how can things go right?"

"What's to be done, friend? What's to be done? . . . She died, it was God's will . . ."

"Have we no girls here? Why, every Thursday they all wait for you to propose to one of them," she said, cunningly trying to draw him out. But Boryna only scratched his head and smiled, looking instinctively towards Yagna, who was going out.

Antek expected her exit; so he dressed quickly and slipped out first.

Yagna had to return alone: her companions all lived in the direction of the mill.

"Yagna!" he whispered, coming suddenly out of a hedge-side.

She stopped, knew his voice, and was at once seized with emotion.

"I'll see you home, Yagna!"—He looked round; the night was black, starless. Above them, the wind roared, sweeping over the tree-tops.

His arm enclosed her waist in a tight grasp; and, one close to the other, they both vanished in the gloom.



## CHAPTER VIII

**I**T was on the following day that the news of the marriage arranged between Boryna and Yagna burst upon the village of Lipka.

The Voyt had gone over to her with the proposal. His wife, whom he had severely forbidden to breathe a single word about the matter until he had come back with the answer, waited till evening to visit an acquaintance, on the pretext of borrowing some salt; and as she went away, she took her good friend apart, and whispered:

"Do you know what? Boryna has just sent a proposal to Yagna, daughter of Dominikova. But beware and tell no one, for my husband has forbidden me to speak of it at all."

"Can this be?" she gasped in amazement. "Should my tongue wag of such a thing about the village? . . . So old a man, taking a third wife! . . . And his children, what will they say? . . . Oh, what a world it is!"

No sooner had the Voyt's wife withdrawn than, tying her apron over her head, she hurried through the orchard to the Klembas', "just to borrow a bit of tow to scrub with."

"Have you heard? Boryna is to marry Yagna, daughter of Dominikova! He has but now sent messengers with his proposal."

"Impossible! What do you say? Nay; he has full-grown children, and is himself stricken in years."

"True, he is not young. But they will not refuse him for that. . . . A farmer so reputable, a man so rich!"

"Ah, but that Yagna! she that has had dalliance, and with more than one! To be the wife of the first farmer here! Is there any justice in the world, say? And meanwhile, so many a girl is remaining unwedded—my younger sister, for example!"

"Or my brother's widow. . . . Or the Kopzyva girls. . . . Or Nastka, and many another.—No, it is not seemly, 'tis not meet, not right; what think you?"

"She will be mightily puffed up, and strut about like a peacock, will she not?"

"Great offence of God there must be: be sure that neither the smith nor Boryna's children will suffer her as a stepmother."

"Alas, what can they do? The land is as much his own as his will is."

"By law, yes; but in justice, it belongs to them as well."

"My dear friend, justice is always for him who has the power to get it on his side."

They continued thus, complaining and inveighing against the world and all its deeds, and went their way. And with them the news spread throughout the hamlet.

The little work there was to do was not urgent; so the people were all at home, the roads being as quaggy as so many sloughs; and the possible marriage was discussed in every cabin. All were eagerly expectant of what would take place. They well knew how headstrong Boryna was, and that he would not be turned away from a course he had chosen for himself, even were his Reverence to dissuade him. They knew, too, the unyielding pride of Antek's nature.

Even those men who had been drafted to mend the mill-side road where the dam had burst, stopped in their work to talk of so momentous an occurrence.

Various opinions were set forth; and at last, old Klemba, an intelligent and respected farmer, gave the stern judgment:

"The whole village will be the worse for this!"

"Antek will not suffer it," someone said. "What, another mouth to feed?"

"That would make no difference. But the inheritance! There's the rub."

"There will surely have to be a marriage settlement."

"Yes; Dominikova is shrewd, and will manage that."



"She is a mother," Klemba put in, "and even a bitch will defend her own puppies."

Thus, all the afternoon, the people in the village were talking the matter over. Which was no wonder, the Boryna family being of the very best stock of husbandmen, and Matthias holding land which had from time immemorial belonged to his people, being also endowed with hereditary keenness of wit, as well as riches; so that everybody, willingly or not, had to take him into account.

To none of his children, however, not even to the smith, durst anyone tell the news: the rage it would cause might be so great as to result in a sound thrashing for the teller.

All then was quiet at Boryna's hut; more so, indeed, than usual. The rain had ceased since morning, and the sky was clear. Antek, along with Kuba and the womenfolk, had been sent to the forest at once after breakfast, in order to get some dry fuel, and see whether they could not rake together some supply of pine-needles.

Boryna himself had stayed at home. Since early morning, he had been curiously ill-humoured and strangely irritable, always on the look-out for someone who should bear the brunt of the impatience and nervousness which had seized upon him. He had beaten Vitek for omitting to spread straw beneath the cows, which consequently had spent the night with their sides deep in dung; had quarrelled with Antek, and scolded Hanka, because her little boy had dirtied himself while playing outside the house; and had even spoken harshly to Yuzka.

When he was at last alone with Yagustynka, engaged overnight to see to the cattle the next day, he no longer knew what to do with himself. Again and again did he call to mind what Ambrose had related of his reception by Dominikova. Nevertheless he felt uneasy, and doubtful of the old fellow, who was able to tell any lie to get a glass of vodka. So he prowled about the hut, looking, now from the window, now from the porch, in the direction of Yagna's dwelling; and as a beggar waits for alms, so he awaited the coming of the night.



Many and many a time did he long to be off to the Voyt's and urge the man to start sooner: notwithstanding, he remained at home, restrained by the look in Yagustynka's eyes, half closed and expressive of sarcastic amusement, which were continually fixed upon him.

"That hag!" he said to himself; "her eyes are gimlets."

She meanwhile went about the house and passage with her distaff under her armpit, seeing to things here and there. She span till her spindle whirled in the air as it turned; then she wound up the thread, and went out to the geese, the swine, the byre, while Lapa, drowsily and heavily, followed her steps. She spoke not a word to the old man, though she well knew what it was that tormented him so, and even drove him to put up stakes round the walls for the winter sheathing that was to keep the house warm.

Now and then, however, she made halt in front of him; and at last she said: "You seem not to be getting on with your work to-day."

"Devil take it! no, I'm not."

"Oh!" she thought, as she went away; "the place will be a hell . . . a hell!—But the old man is right to marry—quite right. If he did not, his children would be sure to give him board and lodging—as mine have done for me! . . . Yes, I made over a good ten acres of the very best land to them. And here I am!" She spat angrily. "I must go out now to work, and lodge in another's dwelling!"

At last the old man, unable to stand it any longer, tossed his ax away and shouted: "Curse this work!"

"There's something that troubles your mind."

"There is, there is!"

"And yet you have no reason in the world to be troubled."

"Much you know of it!"

Yagustynka came and sat down close by the wall, pulled out a long thread, wound it on the spindle, and said, slowly and not without trepidation:

"Fear nothing. Dominikova has a good head, and Yagna is no fool."

"What have you said!" he cried out delighted, and sat down by her side.

"I have eyes to see."

There was a long pause, each awaiting what the other would say.

"Just invite me to your wedding; and I'll sing you such a Hop-song<sup>1</sup> as will bring about a christening in the house in nine months. . . ." So she began; but, seeing the old man scowl, she changed her tone.

"Matthias, you are doing just what you should do. Had I but sought out another husband when mine died, I should not now have to lodge in a house that is not my own. Oh, no! . . . But I was a simpleton, I trusted to my children: they were to board me. I made over all I had to them: and now?"

"But I," he answered in a hard voice, "will give up not one single bit of ground."

"Right.—I had to drag my cause from court to court: the few *zloty* that I had went all that way, yet they got me no justice. And here I am in my old age, degraded to a woman of all work!—Last Sunday I went to them, only just to see my old place once more, and the orchard I had planted myself; and my daughter-in-law beshrewed me, saying I had come to spy on her! To spy, good heavens! . . . I thought I should fall down dead.—I went to his Reverence, that he might rebuke them from the pulpit for those words; but he told me that our Lord would make me amends for the wrong they had done. Aye, aye! of course. For him that has nothing in the world, even God's grace is worth having; but I would far rather have property here on earth, and sleep my fill in a warm room and a feather-bed, and eat much butter and fat, and divert myself!"

She continued holding forth against everything in the world, and with such violence that Boryna left her, and sallied out to the Voyt's: for twilight was at hand.

<sup>1</sup>*Hop-song*—a very primitive sort of nuptial song.—*Translator's Note.*

"Well, are you starting yet?"

"This very minute: Simon will be here at once."

Simon appeared and all three went to the tavern, to toss off a dram and get a flask of rum for the proposal-offering. . . . Ambrose, who was there before them, joined them directly; but they could not drink long, for Matthias was urging them to make haste.

"I shall be waiting here for you. If they drink back, then bring them hither.—And speedily!" he added, calling after them as they went out.

They walked along the middle of the road, splashing through the mud. The twilight deepened, covering the land with its gossamer web of sober grey; and soon the village was no more, save for the cabin lights that began twinkling through the dusk, and the barking of the watchdogs in the farmyards.

"My fellow-messenger!" said the Voyt, after a time.

"Well?"

"Boryna's wedding will, I fancy, be a grand one."

"That's as it may be," the other returned, in surly fashion; he was a taciturn man.

"It will, I tell you—I, the Voyt, a man whom you may believe. We shall make such a match of it that . . . Ha! ha!"

"The mare may prove restive, if so be the stallion prove not to her liking."

"That does not concern us in any wise."

"But his children—they will curse us, sure."

"All shall be well: I the Voyt tell you so."

And they walked into Dominikova's hut.

The room was lighted, and carefully swept; they were expected.

The messengers "praised God"; then, greeting in turn everyone present, took seats close to the fire-place, and opened the conversation.

"The weather is cold; there seems to be a frost at hand."

"Very likely; it is not springtime, nor near it!"

"Have you gathered in all the cabbages?"



"All but a few that we cannot get in just now," the old dame replied indifferently, casting her eyes on Yagna, who was near the window, making up skeins of spun flax, and who looked so comely that the Voyt, a man still in the golden time of life, cast an eager glance at her, before he said:

"As the ways are foul and miry, and the night-air is dank, I and Simon the Soltys here thought we would enter your dwelling on our way. And seeing that you have received us with a kind and friendly welcome, perchance, Mother, we may even drive a bargain with you."

"A bargain may be driven only when there is something about which to drive it."

"Spoken truly, Mother, but that we have found already in your house: livestock, and of the best."

"Well," she cried, in good humour, "let us bargain, then."

"We would fain, for instance, bargain for a heifer of yours."

"Oho! that will be no small thing, and ye shall not lead her away with the first rope at hand!"

"As to that, we have for her a hallowed silver cord, and such that none can break it, he be strong as ten.—Well, how much, Mother?" And he pulled the flask of rum out of his pocket.

"How much?—Hard to say! She is young, will be nineteen in spring: good and hard-working. She might yet remain a year or two with her dam."

"Years without offspring, Mother; barren years!"

"Ah," Simon whispered, "were she other than she is, she might have offspring, even should she stay with her dam!"

The Voyt gave vent to a loud laugh. The old woman's eyes flashed angrily, and she made answer on the spot:

"Seek another, then! Mine can wait."

"She can; but we can find nowhere another so beautiful, or of so good a breed."

"Then what do you say?"

"I who speak am the Voyt: so believe what I tell you."—He took out a glass, wiped it on the skirt of his capote,

filled it with rum, and said gravely: "Pay good heed, Dominikova, to what I say now. I am in office. A bird on the bough may chirp and twitter, and is gone: my word is not thus.—Simon too: all here know who he is; no man of straw, but a husbandman, the father of a family, and our Soltys! Mark well, then, who we are that come to you, and with what intention; mark this well."

"I do so, Peter, and most carefully."

"Now you, being a wise woman, must therefore know that, sooner or later, Yagna will surely leave your house for her own, as the Lord hath ordained. Parents breed up their children, not for themselves, but for the public weal."

"Ah, Mother, 'tis true, 'tis true!

"You may pet her and guard and caress,  
But give her you must none the less;  
Aye, and him that shall take her you'll bless!"

"The world is made so, and there is no changing it.—Now, Mother, shall we drink together?"

"How can I say? I will not force her.—Will you drink, Yagna?"

"I . . . I don't know," she stammered in a thin voice, turning her burning face to the window.

"The lass is docile," Simon put in, with gravity. "'A docile calf, beyond all doubt, thrives, sucks much milk, and waxes stout.'"

"Well, shall I pass it on to you, Mother?"

"Drink ye, by all means; but we do not yet know who it is proposes," Dominikova remarked, attentive to the rules of etiquette that required her not to seem to know until told by the messenger.

"Who?" he exclaimed. "Why, who but Boryna himself!" and he lifted his glass.

"What, an aged man! A widower!" she objected, as in duty bound.

"Aged? 'Tis a sin to say so! Aged? and but now he was accused."

"I know: only the child was not his."

"How could it be? A man of such repute, was he to put up with any but the very best?—Come, here's to you, Mother!"

"Fain would I drink; but he is a widower.—Old, he may soon be in Abraham's bosom: and what then? Her step-children would thrust her out."

Here Simon interposed. "Matthias," he growled, "said there must needs be a settlement."

"Of course before the wedding."

The Voyt, having filled another glass, turned with it to Yagna.

"Come, drink, Yagna, drink to us! The swain we propose you is strong as an oak: you'll be his lady, the keeper of his household, the first of all in the village! See, I drink to you, Yagna: do not be shamefaced!"

She flushed scarlet, and turned away; but finally, throwing her apron over her face, she tasted a little, and threw the rest on to the floor.

The glass then passed round to all. The old dame produced bread and salt, and lastly some dried and smoked sausages as a relish.

Several times in succession did they drink, and in a little their tongues were loosened. But Yagna had fled into the inner chamber, where, she knew not why, her tears burst forth, her sobs becoming audible through the partition. Her mother would have followed, but the Voyt kept her back.

"Even calves, when weaned from their dams, shed tears: 'tis common. She is not to go away, no, not to the next village even: and you will still enjoy each other's company. It is I, the Voyt, who say it: she shall come to no harm: believe me."

"Aye, but I always thought to have grandchildren for my consolation."

"Let not that trouble you. The first of them will be here before the harvest!"

"The future is known to the Lord alone, not to us sin-



ners. We have drunk to her betrothal, and yet my heart is heavy, as if 'twere a burial."

"Nothing strange. An only daughter, she ought to be duly mourned over. . . . Yet a little more, to drive your grief away.—Ah, do you know, let us all go to the tavern. There Yagna's future husband awaits us, boiling over with fierce impatience."

"Shall we celebrate such an occasion in a tavern?"

"As our fathers of yore. I, the Voyt, have spoken."

Yagna and Dominikova put on their best dresses, and all started off. But the Voyt remarked how disappointed her brothers were looking. "Are the lads to remain, then?" he said. "It is their sister's engagement-day: some pleasure is due to them."

"Can we leave the house to the care of Providence?"

"Then take Agatha from the Klembas; she will see to the place."

"She has gone begging. We shall get someone on our way. Well, Simon and Andrew, come; but put your capotes on. Would you come in your shabby everyday clothes?—And if either of you gets tipsy . . . he will never forget it!—The kine have not yet been cared for, and ye must mash potatoes for the swine.—See ye to it."

"We will, Mother, we will!" they both exclaimed, trembling with fear, though they were both big lads, as high as a small pear-tree, such as are planted along the fields.

And so presently they went to the tavern.

The night was murky and as dark as pitch, as is usual enough during the autumn rains. The wind roared overhead, swaying the tree-tops till they nearly lashed the neighbouring hedges.

When they arrived, the tavern had a gloomy look. A pane had been broken in the window, and the gusts that entered made the tiny lamp which hung above the bar by a cord swing there to and fro like a golden flower.

Boryna rushed to welcome and embrace and hug them warmly, knowing that Yagna was already as good as his own.

"Our Lord hath said: 'Thou worm, take unto thee a wife, that thou, poor wretch, shouldst not suffer loneliness!' So Ambrose said, or bleated rather: he had been drinking for more than an hour, and was good for little, either in the talking or the walking line.

The Jew instantly set before them rum, sweetened vodka, and "essence"; also salt herrings, saffron-seasoned cakes, and others (very dainty) made with poppy-seed.

"Eat ye, drink ye, dearly beloved brethren, true Christians!" cried Ambrose, taking upon himself to invite the guests. "I had a wife once—but cannot at all remember now where—In France, I think—no, in Italy! No, not there—but now I am bereft and a widower. . . . I tell you: our ancients used to cry thus: 'Attention!'"

Here Boryna interrupted him. "Drink deep, friends! . . . And you, Peter, give the example!" And then he brought Yagna a whole *zloty's* worth of caramels, and put them into her hand. "Here you are, Yagna, they are very sweet: here you are!"

She made as if she were disinclined to take them. "They cost so much money," she said.

"Fear not, I can well afford it. . . . You will see later.—Oh, if pigeon's milk were to be bought for any money, I would buy some for you, dear! Oh, how happy you will be with me!" And, taking her round the waist, he pressed her to partake of all that was there. And she did: accepting all, however, as coolly and indifferently as if it were someone else's engagement-day. She only thought: "Will the old man give it me before the wedding, that coral necklace he told me of at the fair?"

And now they began to drink in earnest—rum and sweetened vodka alternately, and all talked at the same time. Even Dominikova was not a little flustered, and she chattered and held forth about many a matter, so that the Voyt wondered at the wisdom she displayed.

Her sons were likewise in their cups, for again and again either Ambrose or the Voyt urged them to take some more. "Toss off your glasses, boys, 'tis Yagna's engagement-day!"

"Yes, yes, we know," they answered, and wanted to kiss the old sexton's hand.

It was then that Dominikova took Boryna apart to have a straight talk with the man,

"Yagna is yours—yes, yours, Matthias!"

"Thanks, Mother, for your gift of her." He put his arm round her neck and embraced her.

"You promised to make her a settlement, I understand."

"Why need there be any? All I have is hers."

"In order that she may look her stepchildren in the face and laugh at their curses."

"Woe betide them, if they interfere! All is mine, all is Yagna's."

"Kindly said. Only note this: you are somewhat elderly. Besides, we all are mortal. And, you know:

"Death none can refuse:  
He takes all he can,  
Now a lamb, now a man,  
Not caring to choose!"

"Oh, but I am hale—good for a score of years yet. Never you fear!"

"'Never-Fear was eaten by the wolves.'"

"Well, I am glad you speak out! Would you have me settle on her the three acres I have, close to Luke's field?"

"'A hungry dog will try even to catch a fly,' as they say; but we are not hungry. Yagusia is to inherit five acres, besides one of forest-land, from her father. Settle six acres on her, you: those six where you grew potatoes last summer—close to the road."

"My very best fields!"

"Yagna too is the pick of the village."

"She is, indeed: therefore I sent you my proposers. But, mercy on us! six acres! It is a whole farm!" He scratched his head in perplexity; for his heart was sore at the thought of giving up so much of his best land.

"My good friend, consider, like the intelligent man you are, and you will see that the settlement is only a protection



for my daughter. No one can take the land from you, so long as you live: while all that Yagna has inherited from her father will be yours at once. I will send for a land-surveyor when spring comes round, and you will even be able to sow it then. And, seeing that such an arrangement cannot harm you, you will readily settle those six acres upon her."

"Good: I will."

"And when?"

"To-morrow, if you like!—No, on Saturday, when we have put up the banns; we shall then go straight to town. After all: 'A goat dies once, and then—Never again!'"

"Come hither, Yagna, daughter dear!" She called to the girl, whom the Voyt was pushing towards the bar, while telling her something that made her laugh loud.

"Yagna, Matthias here will settle on you those six roadside acres of his."

"Many thanks," she murmured, and offered him her hand.

"Drink ye all to Yagna, most sweet Yagna!"

They drank, and Matthias put his arm round her waist to lead her to the other guests assembled; but she slipped away, and ran to her brothers, who were talking and drinking with Ambrose.

In the tavern, the din was ever growing louder and louder, as more people dropped in. Many, hearing voices, had come in to know what was going forward: some, too, to get a drink for nothing. Even the blind old man, led by his dog, was there in a good place, where all could see him; and he now listened and now said prayers aloud; so loud that Dominikova, hearing him, gave him some vodka, a morsel to eat, and a few kopeks besides.

The carouse went on; and soon, as is customary on such occasions, everybody was dear friend and own brother to everybody else.

The only silent one was the Jew. To and fro he glided, ever setting more and more spirits and bottles of beer before his guests, and scoring up everything with chalk behind the door.

Boryna, beside himself with joy, took dram after dram, urged his guests to drink, talked as he had seldom in his life been heard to talk, and was incessantly coming round to Yagna, offering her dainties, stroking her beautiful face, and taking her into some dusky corner, with his arm round her.

Very soon Dominikova saw it was high time to go home, and called her sons to set out with her.

Simon was quite fuddled now; so when she spoke, he set his girdle straight, smote the table with his fist, and cried out:

"Out upon it! I am a farmer, I! Who cares to go, let him go. If I choose to stay and drink, I will.—More vodka, you Jew!"

"Be silent, Simon! Oh, be silent: else she will trounce you!" So Andrew moaned, with maudlin tears in his eyes, pulling his brother by the coat. He, too, was very far gone.

"Boys!" she hissed, threateningly, "home! come home!"

"I am a farmer. I! If I choose to stay, Lo, I stay, and drink. . . . I have enough of Mother's rule. . . . Thwart me, and I turn you out! Down with it all!"

But the old woman then struck him such a blow in the chest that he staggered and was sobered forthwith. Andrew took him out into the road, after placing his cap on his head. But the cold air overcame Simon once more: he only took a few steps forwards, then tottered, caught at the hedge, and fell down, shrieking and groaning.

"Sdeath! I am a farmer. The property is mine, and I drink, if I choose; and if I choose, I work!—Jew! more rum!—Thwart me, and I turn you out!"

"Simon! Simon! For God's sake!" whimpered Andrew, weeping abundantly; "come home, Mother is after you!"

Indeed, she was there directly, together with Yagna; and they both got the lads from beneath the hedge, where they were making some feeble attempts to fight.

After their departure, other people also went out, and the tavern grew somewhat less noisy. At last no one re-



mained there but Boryna and his messengers, with Ambrose and the blind beggar, all now drinking at one table.

Ambrose was very mellow indeed. He stood up in their midst, now singing, now shouting very loud.

"He was quite black—black as that pot! He aimed . . . but where did he hit me? where? . . . And I—I thrust my bayonet into him, and twisted it: I heard his inside gurgle!—So we halt—halt! And the commander himself arrives with more men.—Ah! the commander! 'Boys,' he says, 'boys!'"

"'Attention!'" the old man cried, in a voice of thunder. And he stood stiffly erect, and stepped slowly backwards, his wooden leg stumping along the floor: "Drink to me, Peter! to me who am an orphan!" he bleated out; but when close to the wall, suddenly he whipped out of the place. But they could still hear the braying of his voice, raised in song outside.

Just then the miller entered the tavern: a big burly fellow, red-faced, dressed town-fashion, and with small keen eyes.

"Drink, lads, drink together!—Ho, ho! the Voyt, the Soltys, and Boryna!—Is it a wedding?"

"No, it is not.—Sir miller, take a drink with us," Boryna said.

And once more the vodka went round.

"Well, now to you all three thus together, I shall tell some news that will sober you in no time."

All stared at him vacantly.

"Not an hour since, the Squire sold the clearing of Vilche Doly!"

"The hound! the miscreant! What, sell a clearing that belongs to our village!" Boryna shouted, smashing a bottle on the floor in a fit of rage. "Sold it, has he? But there is law—law both for the Squire and for all of us!" Simon stammered; he was completely intoxicated.

"It's false! I, your Voyt, have spoken: believe me, it's false!"

"Sold it! Ha!—But we won't let anyone take it: as



there's a God in heaven, we won't!" Boryna growled, and he brought his fist down upon the table.

The miller left them, and they stayed there far into the night, taking counsel together, and breathing threats against the manor-folk.

## CHAPTER IX

**I**T was shortly after Yagna's engagement had taken place; All Souls' Day had dawned.

Ever since morning, the church-bells of Lipka had tolled incessantly, slowly; their doleful and sorrowful notes, floating over the desolate fields, called the people together with deep-sounding voices of sadness on this day, which rose pallid and swaddled in fog, as far as the far-off horizon—where the earth and the sky met, no one knew where, in a vague unfathomed abyss of vacuity.

Now, as soon as the sun arose in the east, which still glowed red as copper molten and cooling, hosts of crows and daws had been coming thence, winging their flight from beyond the lurid clouds.

They flew very high; so high that neither the eye could well make them out, nor the ear catch distinctly the wild and melancholy harshness of their croaking, which sounded like weeping in the autumn night.

And from the belfry, the tolling sounded continually.

The deep notes of that doleful hymn rolled heavily through the thick nebulous air—rolled all over the countryside, and men and fields and villages seemed as one vast heart, throbbing to the dismal dirge.

And still the flocks of birds increased, even to the dismay and stupefaction of the people; for now they flew lower, ever in vaster multitudes, sprinkling the sky as with scattered specks of soot; and the dull flapping and croaking was now louder, more boisterous, more turbulent—like a storm that is drawing nigh. They swept in circles over the village: and as a heap of dead leaves the blast plays with, so they wheeled over the ploughed lands, floated down to the woods, hung above the skeleton poplar-trees, took pos-

session of the lindens round about the church, and perched upon the trees in the burial-ground.

"A severe winter it will be," people said.

"Snow is going to fall—they are flying towards the woods."

They now approached the huts in still greater numbers; never before had so many been seen together. People looked at them, sighing, in fear of an evil omen, and some made on their brows the sign of the Cross, as a protection from the evil to come, and put on their garments to set out for church. And continually the tolling sounded with a dull roar; from the neighbouring villages the people were already coming to pray.

An all-pervading sense of desolation filled every soul; in every heart, there reigned a strange distressful silence: the stillness of mournful reminiscences, the recollections of those who had gone before, gone to lie beneath the drooping birch-trees, and the darkly looming crosses, that stood slantwise in the churchyard.

"O my Jesus! O my beloved Jesus!" they would murmur, and then raise up their ashen-grey faces, and fear no longer, plunging into the mystery of futurity: and they calmly went forward to present their offerings and to say their prayers for the dead.

The whole village was as though lost in a sea of grave and heart-stricken quietude: only the whining singsong of the *Dziads* at the churchdoor now and then broke the stillness.

At Boryna's, the silence was especially deep: though indeed it was of that hell which reigned amongst them, and was on the point of bursting forth.

His children knew all by that time.

The day before being Sunday, the first banns had been published from the pulpit. On Saturday, Boryna had gone with Yagna to town, where he had settled six acres of land upon her in the presence of a notary. He came back late, and with his face scratched. Being the worse for liquor, he had behaved disrespectfully to Yagna; but had only got



acquainted with the strength of her arm and the sharpness of her nails.

On his return, he said no word to anyone, but went to bed as he was—in his boots and sheepskin coat; and when Yuzka next morning complained that he had soiled his feather-bed with mud:

"Let me alone, Yuzka, let me alone!" he answered her merrily. "Such a thing may happen sometimes, even to one who has not been drinking."

In the morning he had gone over to Yagna, and stayed all day: at home, dinner and supper waited for him in vain.

This day, too, he rose late, considerably after dawn, put on his best capote, ordered Vitek to smear his Sunday boots with grease and line them with fresh-cut straw, was shaved by Kuba, girt himself, and, taking his hat, slipped out through the fence, and was seen there no more that day.

Yuzka cried all the time. Antek was in the grip of tortures, even sharper and more agonizing, and could neither eat, nor sleep, nor busy himself in any way. He felt dazed as yet, and could not wholly realize what had come to pass. His face had grown sombre, but his eyes seemed larger, and flaming glassily—full of hardened tears, as it were. He had to clench his teeth lest he should cry out and curse aloud, and was continually walking about the cabin, or around it, or about the enclosure, or in the road; and on coming back, he would throw himself on a bench in the porch, and sit there motionless for hours, racked by sufferings that were ever growing more intolerable.

The house was dreary, and within it there continually resounded the sound of weeping, as sobs and sighs resound in a house wherein someone lies dead. The doors of the byre and the sties stood wide open, the cattle and swine wandered about at liberty in the orchard, some even looking in at the windows. No one attempted to interfere with them but old Lapa, who barked and tried to drive them in again, but unsuccessfully.

Sitting on his truckle-bed in the stable, Kuba was clean-

ing a gun, while Vitek, gazing at him in wondering awe, took care to keep a look-out on the yard, for fear someone might drop in.

"Oh, what a noise it made! Lord! I thought it was the Squire or the keeper shooting."

"Ah, yes. I had not shot for ever so long, and the charge I put in was too big: it roared like a cannon."

"Did you go in the evening at once?"

"Aye, to the manor lands close to the wood. The roe-bucks are fond of coming that way to crop the sprouting blades in the sown fields. It was very dark, and I had long to wait. Just at dawn, a buck came by. I was so well hidden that he was only five paces away from me. But I did not shoot. He was as big as an ox, and I knew I could not carry him off. So I spared him; and after the space of a few Paters, some does appeared. I chose the finest, and took aim. What a report there was! I had put in a heavy charge: it kicked so, my shoulder is one bruise still. And the doe fell; but she still kicked, and made such a fearful noise that I was afraid the keeper might hear, and I had to cut her throat."

Vitek was full of enthusiasm.

"And—did you leave her in the wood?"

"Where I left her, I left her: it's no business of yours. And if you say a single word about this to anyone . . . you'll see what I shall do to you!"

"I won't, if you forbid me; but may I not tell Yuzka?"

"The whole village would know directly. No.—But here is a five-kopek piece, for you to buy something with."

"Without that, I'd hold my tongue.—But, O dear, dear Kuba! take me with you some day!"

"Breakfast!" Yuzka was in front of the cabin, calling to them.

"Be easy, Vitek, I shall take you."

"And you'll let me shoot—once, only once?" he entreated.

"Silly one! think you they give gunpowder for nothing?"

"But I have money, Kuba, I have. Master gave me two



*zloty* for the last fair, and I was keeping them for the Memorial offering. But . . ."

"Very well; I shall teach you how to shoot," he whispered, patting the boy's head, and touched by his appeal.

Almost as soon as they had finished breakfast, they went together to church. Kuba limped along as fast as he could; but Vitek lagged a little behind: he was ashamed to have to go barefoot, for he had no boots.

"Is it right to go into the vestry without boots?" he queried in a low voice.

"You are foolish. Does our Lord consider a man's boots, not his prayers?"

"True; but are not boots more respectful?" he whispered sadly.

"Oh, you will get boots one of these days."

"That I shall! Let me but grow up to be a farm-hand, I shall directly go off to Warsaw and get a place in some stable. In the town, they all wear boots, don't they, Kuba?"

"They do.—Can you remember anything about Warsaw, Vitek?"

"Of course. I was five when Kozlova brought me here; so I recollect perfectly. . . . Yes, we went on foot to the station, and there I saw no end of glowing lights . . . and houses all one close to another, and as big as churches."

"Nonsense!" cried Kuba, disdainfully.

"But I remember quite well. I could not see the roofs, they were so high. Windows, too, to the very ground. Whole walls of windows! And everywhere bells were ringing continually."

"No wonder; there are so many churches there."

"Else whence could the ringing have come?"

And now they were silent, having entered the churchyard and begun to push their way through the dense throngs that filled all the space round the church, not being able to get in.

There the *Dziads* had formed a lane from the church to the road, crying out, screaming, uttering prayers, or asking



alms, each in his own way; some were playing on fiddles, and droning out hymns in mournful voices; others on flageolets or concertinas; and all together causing such a racket as almost to make one deaf.

The vestry, too, was full of people: so full that they were sorely squeezed against the tables, where the organist and his son (the one who had been at school) were taking down the names given for the Memorial offerings.

Kuba got through the press, and rolled off a long list of names to the organist, who wrote them down, and received for each soul three kopeks, or as many eggs (in case one had no ready cash).

Vitek was not able to push forward so fast, for his bare feet were sorely trod upon, but he got on as well as he could, clutching the money in his hand. When, however, he found himself in front of the organist at the table, he felt suddenly overwhelmed and tongue-tied with confusion. What! only farmers and farmers' wives round him—almost all those of the village . . . ? Even the miller's wife was there, wearing a hat like the wife of the Squire!—And the blacksmith and the Voyt, with their dames—all giving the names of those whose souls they wished remembered; some as many as a score of them—all the family, and their fathers and forefathers.—And he . . . what name could he give? His own father, his mother—what names had they? Could he tell? For whom, then, should his offering be made? . . . "O my Jesus, my little Jesus!" he cried in his soul; but his mouth remained wide open, and he stood there like a witness. His heart was wrung with an agony of grief, he could hardly draw his breath, and he felt so faint that he was like to drop down as one dead. But he could not stay there; the crowd shoved him aside into a corner, beneath the holy water stoup: and, in order not to fall, he crouched down with his head against the tin basin, while tears gushed forth and fell, like the beads of some rosary of desolation. It was in vain that he tried to keep them back; he was so shaken, so unnerved in every limb, that he had not even

the strength to clench his teeth and stand up. So he crept into a corner out of sight, and wept abundant tears—the bitter tears of a fatherless, motherless boy.

“Mother, O Mother!” something within him was crying, and tearing his heart to pieces. . . . He could not think why each of the other lads had his father and his mother, while he alone was without either—bereft—and how bereft—of both!

“Jesus, my Jesus!” he sobbed, crying out like a poor bird strangling in a snare. . . . It was then that Kuba came upon him and said:

“Vitek, have you given in your Memorial offering?”

“Not yet,” he returned; and, suddenly drying his eyes, he forced his way back to the table. Yes: he would give names. Did it concern anyone that he had no parents he knew? If he had none, it was his own affair. If he was a foundling, a foundling let him be.—He therefore took heart, wiped his eyes, and boldly gave the names Josephine, Marianna, Anthony—the first that occurred to him.

He paid, took the change, and went with Kuba into the church to pray and hear the priest read the names of his dear departed!

A catafalque, bearing a coffin at its summit, had been raised in the centre of the church. Round it many tapers were burning, while the priest read aloud from the pulpit an interminable list of names. Now and then he stopped, and the whole congregation said the Paters, Aves, and Credos that should relieve the souls of the faithful departed.

Vitek knelt down by the side of Kuba; the latter took out a rosary, and counted thereon all the prayers which the priest had recommended. Vitek too recited a few prayers; but the monotonous sounds soon made him drowsy, and, worn out by the heat of the place and his recent fit of tears, he presently rested his head against Kuba and went to sleep.

. . . . .

In the afternoon, all the Boryna family were present at the Vespers which were sung once a year in the churchyard



mortuary chapel. Antek and his family, the blacksmith and his, Yuzka accompanied by Yagustynka, and Vitek, and Kuba dragging himself in the rear, had come, determined to make the most they could of All Souls' Day.

As a man shuts his weary eyelids, and plunges into dark unfathomable shadows, so evening was closing in; the wind sounded with a dreary voice, long drawn out, and wafted the odours of many a mouldering leaf, redolent with unpleasant effluvia.

The country-side was serene, with the strange and sombre calm of that anniversary of sadness. The crowds went about their way—as it were, in painful silence; their tramping boots echoed with dull dead sounds: the roadside trees waved their boughs restlessly, and swayed overhead with a sad sullen murmur.

In front of the lich-gate and about the graves along the wall, stood rows of barrels, and many a *Dziad* was close by. It was by this road that the people came along to the burial-ground. The twilight had already covered the world, sprinkling it with its ashen greyness, although there twinkled athwart its folds many a rustic lamp (fed with butter for oil!), with yellow flickering flame. Each one, on entering the churchyard, took from his wallet either bread, or cheese, or a piece of bacon or of sausage; or a skein of thread, or else a handful of combed flax; sometimes even a string of dried mushrooms. These they deposited piously in one of the barrels that stood open there; they formed offerings for the priest, for the sacristan Ambrose, for the organist—and, lastly, for the *Dziads*. Such as had no offerings in kind to give, put a few kopeks into the outstretched hands of the latter, whispering the names of the dead for whom they asked them to intercede.

About the lich-gate, then, there was a continuous cadence of names called out, and prayers, and chants, in broken and unequal rhythm. The people went on and soon disappeared, vanishing among the graves. Presently, like so many glow-worms, tiny lights began to shine and tremble in the dusky thickets and the dry grass.



Breaking the stillness, which, as it were, exhaled from out of the earth, prayers were everywhere audible, in low quavering tones of awe. Now and again there would come from some grave a heart-broken sigh; sometimes a thrilling lament would rise from the winding paths around the crosses; and then a sudden short shriek of despair would burst forth, rending the air like a flash of lightning; or the faint weeping of children would be heard among the murky bushes, like the chirping of unfledged birds in their nests.

From time to time, there would creep over the churchyard a dull and dreary silence, when only the trees were audible, murmuring ominously, as the sound of human miseries and sorrows and clamorous agony floated up to Heaven.

They went about the graves noiselessly, and terror-struck they stared into the dim and unknown distance.

"All must die!" they muttered, in tones of torpid palsy-stricken resignation, and went on further, to sit by the graves of their fathers, and either recite orisons, or remain motionless, in a reverie that deadened both love of life and fear of death—aye, and even abhorrence of pain. They were like trees, bowing low in the blast; and, like them, their souls quivered slumberously: dismayed, yet benumbed.

"O my Jesus! O merciful Lord! O Mary!"—such were the ejaculations which burst forth from their tormented souls. They raised their faces—now expressionless with grief—and fixed their hollow eyes on the crosses, and on those trees in drowsy yet perpetual motion: and falling on their knees at the feet of the crucified Christ, they laid before Him their fear-stricken hearts, and shed tears of resignation and self-surrender.

Kuba went with Vitek in the same direction; but when it became quite dark, the former crawled further on—away to the old burial-ground. There the forgotten ones lay—those whose very memory had perished long ago, with their days, and the times they lived in, and all the past. There, only ill-omened birds uttered hoarse croakings, and the bushes rustled mournfully near some cross of rotting wood that still

remained standing here and there. In this forgotten nook lay side by side whole families, hamlets, generations: no one came there to pray, to shed tears, to light lamps any more. The gale alone blew fiercely through the boughs, tore off the last of their leaves, and tossed them away into the night, to be lost therein. And voices howled that were not voices; and shadows moved—but were they only shadows?—striking at random against the trees, as though they had been blinded birds, and seeming to moan and beg for pity!

Kuba took from his bosom several pieces of bread that he had put by. Kneeling down, he broke them, and threw the morsels about among the tombs.

"Food for you there is, O Christian soul!" he whispered, very earnestly. "I forget you not at eventide.—Food for you, O sufferer that was mortal!—Food for you!"

"And will they take it?" Vitek asked in terror.

"Beyond doubt!—Our priest forbids it.<sup>1</sup>—The others put the food into those barrels, and these poor creatures get nothing. But what? Shall the priest's and the *Dziads'* swine have to eat, and Christian ghosts stray starving!"

"Ah! will they come hither?"

"Yea, all who suffer the cleansing fires—all. Jesus lets them back to earth for to-day, to visit their people."

"To visit them!" Vitek repeated, shuddering.

"Fear not. On this day, nothing evil has any power to harm: the Memorial offerings have driven him away—him, the bad Angel! So have the lamps. And our Lord comes in person about the world, and He, the beloved Shepherd, goes counting how many souls are His yet, and choosing from amongst them."

"Oh, does our Lord Jesus come to the earth to-day?" Vitek said faintly, looking around.

<sup>1</sup> Because it was a superstition: a very old one, no doubt, come down from prehistoric times, and now all but dead in Poland, if not quite so. Mickiewicz's poem "*Dziady*" deals with something similar which he came across in Lithuania, about a century ago.—*Translator's Note.*



"Do you think to see Him? That only Saints can do—and persons greatly wronged."

"See, see, lights are there; and there are people too," Vitek cried out in alarm, and he pointed to a long row of graves close to the hedge.

"Ah, there lie those slain during our insurrection. Yes, my master lies there; aye, and my mother too."

They forced their way through the underwood, and knelt down by the graves. These had fallen in, and were so level with the rest of the ground that they could hardly be traced. They were marked by no crosses, overshadowed by no trees. Only barren sand was there, and a few dry stalks of mullein: all was stillness, oblivion, death.

Ambrose, together with Yagustynka and old Klemba, were kneeling beside those perishing graves. A few lamps glimmered, fixed in the sand; the winds made them wave and tremble, and carried away the supplications into the blackness of the night.

"Aye; there lies my mother," Kuba said, rather to himself than to the boy, who had crept close to him, chilled to the very marrow.

"Magdalena was her name. My father had land of his own: he served as coachman to the manor, but never drove out, save with the old Squire, and stallions to the coach! . . . After that, he died. . . . His uncle inherited the land, and I became swineherd to the manor. . . . Yes, Magdalena was my mother's, and Peter, my father's name: surname, Soha, and I bear it. . . . Then the Squire set to making me coachman, to drive with his stallions, as my father had done. . . . I was continually going to the chase, with Master and other gentlemen; and I learned to shoot pretty well myself; and the son of the Squire gave me a gun. . . .

"I remember perfectly. . . . When they all went out for the insurrection, they took me with them too. . . . I fought for a whole year: killed more than one Russian grey dog . . . more than two, even. . . . Then the Squire's son was



shot in the belly. His bowels gushed out. He was my master, and a good man; so I took him on my shoulders and carried him away. . . . Later, he got off somewhere to a warm country, but first gave me a letter to take to his father. Well, I went. I was weary of all, dog-tired . . . got shot in the leg on my way, and it would not heal; for I was always out of doors, sleeping under the stars. . . . Then came snow, and a terrible frost:—I remember well! . . . So I got there . . . at night . . . and looked about for the place.—Oh, what a thunderstroke!—No more manor—no more barns—no more hedges, even. All had been burned down to the ground. . . . And the old Squire . . . and his lady . . . and my mother too . . . and also the girl Yosefka, who was chambermaid there . . . all lay in the garden, slaughtered!—O Jesus! Jesus!—Aye, I remember.—O holy Mary!” These last words he uttered very low; great tears that he did not care to hide ran down his cheeks in floods, and he heaved deep sighs, as that night rose again before him.

The darkness grew more and more intense; the blast caught more and more fiercely at the trees; the long tresses of the birch-boughs thrashed the graves about them, and their trunks, white as sheeted ghosts, loomed dimly through the gloom. The folk were leaving the place, the lamps going out, the hymns of the *Dziads* dying away. A solemn silence, disturbed only by weird rustlings and thrilling whispers, now reigned among the tombs. The graveyard seemed filled with shadowy forms, the bushes bore questionable shapes; there were melodies of lulled soft moans, oceans of eerie tremors, movements of shapeless things in the dark, bursts of dread hushed sobs, mysterious and horror-breathing alarms which made the heart sink. Throughout the village, the very dogs were howling with long despairing howls.

On this holiday alone, Lipka was hushed. The roads were deserted, the inn-doors closed. Through the tiny mist-blurred window-panes of a few huts, lights were seen to

shine, and holy hymns heard to quaver timidly forth, with loud supplications to God for the souls of the faithful departed.

Outside the cabins, the folk glided about in fear; in fear did they listen to the quiet sighs of the trees; in fear did they look towards the window, lest there should appear to them one of those who, on this day, wander by God's decree and their own yearning—lest they should be heard lamenting where four roads meet—or be seen looking sorrowfully in through the window.

Outside certain huts, the husbandmen—following ancient customs—set the remains of the evening meal for the hungry ghosts to partake of and, crossing themselves, breathed some such invitation: "O Christian soul that still abidest in the place of cleansing, lo! here is refreshment for thee!"

And thus, in stillness and sadness, amidst memories and fears, did the evening of All Souls' Day come to an end.

On Antek's side of his father's cabin sat Roch, the pilgrim to our Lord's sepulchre, reading and telling many a pious and holy legend.

People were there not a few: for both Ambrose and Yagustynka and Klemba had come, Kuba and Vitek, Yuzka and Nastusia: the only one absent was old Boryna, who remained at Yagna's till late in the night.

Save for the crickets that cried and the pine-knots that crackled on the hearth or in the fire, the cabin was still as death.

They all were sitting on benches round the fire; Antek alone sat looking out of the window. Roch now and then drew the red embers together with his staff, while he spoke thus, in a soft hushed voice:

"It is not terrible to die.—Oh, no!

"As birds in winter fly to a warmer land, so do our weary little souls long to fly to Jesus.

"Though the trees stand bare in winter, yet are they clothed in spring by the Lord with green leaves and scented blossoms: thus, O thou soul of man, dost thou go to Jesus

to find with Him joy, and spring, and gladness, and vesture eternal!

"As the sun caresses our weary earth, fatigued with fruit-bearing, so doth our Lord caress each soul, and make it forget the past winter of anguish and death.

"Ah me! for in this world there is naught but trouble, and wailing, and woe!

"And evil increases and multiplies, as doth the thistle in the woodlands!

"All things are vain and to no purpose . . . like tinder-wood, and like the bubbles which the wind maketh on the water and driveth away.

"And there is no faith, nor hope, save in God alone!"



## CHAPTER X

“**I** SPEAK of this, both from the pulpit, and to every man in particular . . .”—The wind put an end to the rest of the sentence by blowing violently down the priest’s throat, making him fall into a fit of coughing. Antek was silent.

The gale was growing fiercer, sweeping down the road, lashing the poplars, storming through them, and causing them to bend and moan and shriek aloud with rage.

“Man, I have told you,” the priest went on to say, “that I myself took the mare down to the pond. . . . Blind as she is, she may go astray in some coppice, and perhaps break a leg.”—The very thought made him turn pale, and he continued looking under every tree, and seeking in every field.

“Well, but she always went about freely.”

“She knows well her way to the pond. Anyone might find a pail for her to drink from, and then turn her round: she would have come back by herself. . . . Valek!” he suddenly cried, thinking he saw someone among the poplars.

“I saw Valek on our side of the pond; but that was before twilight set in.”

“Gone perhaps to look for her: a little too late! . . . A mare twenty years old! She was foaled soon after I came here, and deserves to be fed for mercy’s sake . . . As much attached as any man can be. . . . Good Heavens! if any harm should have befallen the poor beast!”

“What on earth can happen?” Antek growled, in a surly mood. He had come to his Reverence to complain and get counsel; and he had been, not only reprimanded, but asked to seek the lost mare besides! No doubt the mare,

so old and blind, deserved pity; but ought not a fellow-man to come first?

"As to you, you are to master yourself; do you hear? And curse him not! he is your father!"

"Oh, that," said Antek very bitterly, "that I know well."

"It were a grievous sin and offence against God. And no blessing will there be for him that in anger raises his hand against his father, to break the commandment!"

"I want justice: no more."

"No, 'tis revenge you seek. . . . Am I wrong?"

Antek was at a loss for an answer.

"Now I will tell you one thing more: 'A docile calf, beyond all doubt, thrives, sucks much milk, and waxes stout.'"

"'Docile!' The word sticks in my throat, I have so much of it. Shall I allow a man to do me every wrong in the world, simply because he is my father? Are children forbidden to seek justice for the wrong done?—Good God! if that's the order of things, I had as lief bid it farewell, and go anywhere to get away from it."

"Go, then; what is it prevents you?" cried the priest, taking fire on a sudden.

"Well may I go: what—what is there left to me here now?" he muttered, almost in tears.

"You are simply talking nonsense. Others have not one bit of land: yet they stay on, and work, and thank God that they have work to do. You had far better settle down to do something, and not complain like a woman. You are strong and able, and have something to lay your hands to besides. . . ."

"Yes, indeed; three whole acres!" was the ironical reply.

"And a wife and child, who belong to you too: do not forget it."

They were now in front of the tavern; the windows were all aglow, and from the road where they stood they could hear voices inside.

"What! another drunken bout?"

"'Tis the recruits who were chosen during the summer, drinking to keep their spirits up. Next Sunday the Rus-

sians will take them away to somewhere at the back of the world: so they are seeking comfort."

The priest had taken his stand near the poplars, from where he could look through the window, and see how thronged the place was. "Why, the tavern is well-nigh full!" he exclaimed.

"They were to have a meeting and advise together to-day, about the forest clearing which the Squire has sold to the Jews."

"But he has sold only the half."

"Till we have agreed to the sale, not one bush shall be sold!"

"What do you say?" the priest inquired, in a tone of anxiety.

"We don't give leave: that's flat. Father would go to law; but Klemba and the others with him won't have it. They forbid a single tree to be cut down; and if the whole village has to rise, rise they will—aye, and ax in hand, too. What is theirs, they never will give up."

"Merciful heavens! Pray God there may be no violence!"

"No, no! only a few of the manor-folks' heads split in two: that will be but justice!"

"Antek! has anger made you mad? My good fellow, this is senseless talk!"

He would not listen, but turned on his heels and vanished in the gathering dusk; while the priest, who heard the rumble of wheels and a mare's whinny, hastened back to his dwelling.

Antek passed by the mill on the other side, wanting to avoid going near Yagna's hut.

She was fast in his bosom: a festering wound of which he could not rid himself.

Afar, the light shone bright from within her cabin. In there it was joyful. He stopped to look once more, were it but to curse her in his rage. And suddenly something fell on him like a hurricane, and tore him away.

"She is my father's now!—My father's!"



He went round to his brother-in-law, the smith, though expecting no advice from the man, and only wanting to remain a short time away from his father's dwelling, and in somebody's company.—Ah! the priest would preach work to him, would he? Preaching to others was an easy thing for those who have nothing to trouble them!—"Remember your wife and child!"—Was he likely to forget them? Her! . . . whom he loathed so, with her wailing and her meekness and wistfully glancing eyes! Were it not for her . . . were he but single!—O Lord! He groaned deeply; a wild fit of anger swept over him, and he would have liked to take someone by the throat—strangle him—tear him to pieces! . . .

But whom? He knew not. His fury passed away as suddenly as it had come. He looked blankly out into the night and hearkened to the whistling blasts. Then he walked on, trudging heavily, scarce able to drag himself; for now he felt weighed down by a mountain of sorrow, lassitude, and such a sense of prostration that he no longer knew whither he was going, nor for what purpose.

"Yagna is my father's—my father's!" he repeated again and again, each time in a lower key.

In the smith's shop, a boy was working the bellows with might and main, and the draught that poured on to the flaring roaring embers made them burst into blood-red flames. The smith stood at the anvil, grimy-faced, girt with a leather apron, his arms bare, his cap on the back of his head, beating a red-hot iron bar till the anvil resounded, while showers of sparks flew from beneath the hammer, and fell hissing into the moist ground of the forge.

"Well?" he asked, after waiting a moment.

"Well, what?" Antek mumbled, leaning against a basket-wagon frame, several of which were standing by to have their iron-work repaired; and he gazed into the fire.

The smith went on, working hard at the incandescent iron, and beat away, keeping time as he smote upon the anvil with his hammer; or, when a yet more powerful blast

was needed, helping the boy to blow; but ever and anon stealing a glance at Antek, while a malicious smile peeped from under his red moustache.

"Well, so you have been to his Reverence again: and what has come of it?"

"And what should come? Nothing. I might have heard just the same in church."

"What else did you think to get?"

"Why, he knows a great deal," Antek replied in self-defence.

"As to taking, yes; as to giving, no."

Antek was in no mood to contradict him.

"I am going to your cabin," he said after a pause.

"Go; I shall join you at once, for the Voyt is to be here. You will find tobacco on the top of the press: help yourself."

Antek had not so much as heard him, as he made straight for the house which stood opposite.

His sister was kindling the fire, and her eldest boy, at the table, learning out of a spelling-book.

"Is he studying?" he asked; for the boy spelt aloud, pointing to each letter with a sharp stick.

"Yes. He began at potato-digging-time. The young lady from the mill is teaching him, for my husband is too busy."

"Roch, too, began teaching on Father's side of our cabin yesterday."

"I wanted to send our Johnny to him, too: but Michael will not have it. He says she knows more, because she has been at school in Warsaw."

"Oh, yes. Yes," he answered, in order to say something.

"Johnny gets on so fast with his primer that the young lady is astonished."

"Oh, of course. It's the smith's blood, you see—being the son of so clever a man . . ."

"You are jeering. And yet was he not right to tell you that Father can, so long as he lives, withdraw any settlement made?"

"Aye, try to snatch its prey from out of the wolf's mouth! . . . Six acres of land! My wife and I are both as good as his farm-servants; and see, he settles the land on the first strange woman he comes across!"

"You will wrangle, and fall foul of him, and ask for advice against him; and the end will be that he will drive you from his house into the bargain!" She spoke thus, looking timorously towards the door.

"Who told you that?"

"Hush, hush! That's what people are saying."

"He shall not! Let him get me out by force, if he can! I'll go to law. But as to giving way, never, never!"

"Yes, you'll butt your head against a stone wall, like a ram, but never get it smashed, eh?" the smith said, coming in.

"Then what's to be done? You give clever advice to everybody; advise me."

"It will never do to run counter to the old man's will." He lit a pipe, and set about explaining matters, excusing Boryna, and smoothing things over, till all at once Antek saw his drift, and cried out:

"You—you are on his side!"

"I want to be fair."

"You have been well paid for this."

"Not out of your pocket, at all events."

"My property is not yours to give up in my place. You no doubt have had a good instalment already, and are in no hurry to get more."

"I have had no more than you."

"Oh, no more? And what about your share of the cow? And all the pieces of linen, and odds and ends you have sneaked out of Father? Have I forgotten the geese, and the young pigs . . . and . . . and . . . there's no end of them! Ah, and the calf he gave you the other day? Is that nothing?"

"You might have got it just as well as I."

"I am not a gipsy, nor a thief!"



"A thief! Do you call me that?"

They both rushed forward, ready to spring at each other. But they stopped, for Antek went on more calmly:

"I was not speaking of you. But never will I abandon my rights, even to be saved from utter ruin."

The smith interposed, with a jeer: "It is not the land, I fancy, for which you would go to such lengths."

"For what then?"

"It is Yagna you want, and rage to lose her now!"

"Did you ever see . . . ?" he cried; the shot had hit the mark.

"There be those who have seen . . . and not once only."

"May their eyes drop out of the sockets!" But he said this curse very low; for just then the Voyt entered the room. Probably he too was aware of the reason why they quarrelled, for he at once set to justifying and defending the old man's behaviour.

"That you stand up for him is no wonder: he has given you drink and sausages in plenty!"

"No careless talk, pray; I, the Voyt, am speaking to you."

"For your Voytship I care as I care for this broken stick!"

"What!—what has the man said?"

"You have heard; and if not, you shall hear other things which will go yet farther."

"Say them, then, if you dare!"

"I will.—Behold, you are a drunkard, a Judas, a dissembler; one that squanders in revels the money the village has entrusted to him, and takes abundant pay from the manor, to let the Squire sell our forest land. . . . Will ye I say more?" he added furiously, snatching at a stick. "So I will, but with this cudgel, not with my tongue."

"Take care you rue not what you are doing, Antek; I am a man in office!"

"And do not fly at anyone under my roof! This is no tavern!" the smith shouted, placing himself in front of the Voyt. But Antek, now wrought up to exasperation, poured a volley of abuse on them both, slammed the door, and left them.

"Now," he was saying to himself, while breakfasting the next day, "now they will all be against me!" when, to his stupefaction, he saw the blacksmith come in. They met on their usual terms.

When Antek went to the barn afterwards to chop straw, the smith followed him, and said in confidential tones:

"I'll be hanged if I know why we quarrelled . . . some silly word dropped, belike. So I am first to come to you and shake hands."

Antek shook hands indeed, but grunted, with a look of mistrust:

"Yes, some hasty words passed between us; but I felt no grudge against you. That Voyt made me frantic. . . . Let him mind his own business, and keep himself to himself, or . . ."

"So I told him, when he wanted to follow you out. . . ."

"To fight me?—I would have given him such a dressing as I gave his cousin, who has been smashed up ever since harvest-time!"

"Of that, too, did I remind him," the smith observed, with a demure look and a sly leer.

"But I will settle with him yet . . . with that great man, that Jack in office! He will remember me!"

"He is not worth your notice: let him be.—I have had an idea, and have come now to tell you about it. This is what we have to do. . . . This afternoon my wife will come here. You will go with her to old Boryna, and talk the matter over thoroughly. . . . Of what use is complaining in holes and corners? Speak your mind out to him face to face. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps not; but at all events we shall have threshed the matter out."

"But what is to be done, now the settlement has been made?"

"You see, by wrangling we shall get nothing at all. Yes, he has made it. But, so long as he lives, he has the power to revoke it. Do you understand? That is the reason why we must not irritate him. He wants to marry: well, let him. And to enjoy himself: why not?"



At the mention of marriage, Antek turned white, and shook so that he paused in his work.

"Do not oppose him openly. Approve him. Say he was right to make the settlement, since he chose to do so: only ask him to promise us the rest—that is, to you and me, and in presence of witnesses," he added, with a sly after-thought.

"Yes, but what of Yuzka, what of Gregory?" Antek inquired reluctantly.

"They shall get money instead. Gregory has been receiving not a little every month, ever since he has been in the army.—But just listen, and do as I tell you; you will not regret it. My management of things will make all the land ours in the end, my life on it."

"To sew the sheep's skin do not strive, furrier, while the sheep's alive."

"Listen.—Let him but make a promise in presence of witnesses: we shall then have something to lay hold on. We can still fall back on the courts of justice. And there is another point besides: the land he got as your mother's dowry."

"A great thing, forsooth: four acres for me and your sister . . . four whole acres!"

"But these he has not given to either; and for so many years he has sown therein and garnered therefrom! For these he must pay you well, aye, and with percentage too! . . . I tell you once more: oppose the old man in nothing. Go to the wedding; do not grudge him fair words. We shall manage him, you will see. And if he is after all unwilling to give the promise, the law may then come in and force him. You are on very familiar terms with Yagna, and she may be very useful to you: only speak of this to her. No one could better succeed in bringing the old man round.—Well, is it agreed? For I must be stirring."

"Agreed!—That you get out quick, or I will smite you in the face and drive you out of doors!" Antek hissed through his clenched teeth.

"What . . . what has come over you?" the blacksmith



stammered, appalled by the looks of the other, who dropped the straw-cutter and came on, with eyes terribly gleaming and face as pale as a sheet.

"Thief! carrion! traitor!" He spat the words out, his mouth was foaming with hate as he advanced, and the smith fairly ran for it.

"Has the man lost his wits?" he said, as soon as he was out in the road. "I was giving him good counsel . . . and he—Oh, that's your game, is it? You would have struck me, driven me out, because I wanted to share the land with you, and came to you as to a friend and a brother! Is that your game . . . to have all to yourself? Ha! you will not live to see the day, my man! Though you wormed my thoughts out of me so cleverly, I will give you such a shaking, the worst ague will be nothing beside it!" He grew angrier and still more angry, as he reflected that Antek had taken him in so, and would inform old Boryna of all this intrigue.—The very thing he feared most of all!

"But that must at once be prevented!" He swiftly came to a decision, and though in bodily fear of Antek, went back to Boryna's.

"Is your master at home?" he asked Vitek, who was opposite the house, throwing pebbles at the geese in the pond to make them land.

"Over there at the miller's: gone to invite their people to his wedding."

"I shall go that way: perhaps we may meet," he thought, and made for the miller's; but he went home first, and told his wife to dress her best, take the children with her, and go round to Antek's at the first stroke of the noonday Angelus.

"He will tell you what to do. . . . Do nothing by yourself, for you are not clever; only fall a-crying at the right time, embrace your father's knees and beseech him, and all that. But give good heed to what Antek shall say and your father reply." And so he went on instructing her for some time.

"Now I shall look in at the mill: perhaps our meal is

ground." He was too uneasy to stay any longer in the house and, going out, walked on slowly, often halting to consider.

"The man threatened me; yet he'll do as I told him, I think. Better my wife should be there, and not I.—What else can he do but what I say?—Quarrel—and be expelled!"

He smiled in triumph, set his cap straight and buttoned up his capote, for a chill piercing wind came from the pond.

"There will be frost, surely, or else dirty weather," he predicted, standing on the bridge and looking into the sky, where a scud of driven clouds was passing, not unlike a flock of muddy unwashed sheep. The pond uttered a low murmur, now and then beating upon its shores, along which, scattered about amongst blackened drooping alders and weeping willows, the outlines of women washing linen appeared, traced in red, and the obstreperous clatter of their bats rose on either bank. The roads were empty, save for the numerous flocks of geese, soiled with stiffening mire, that were waddling in and out of the ditches, now filled up with dead leaves and rubbish. Children outside the houses squealed and screamed; and the cocks crowed in the hedges—weather-prophets telling of a change.

"Better wait for him at the mill!" he growled and walked down the slope.

Antek, when the smith left him, had set to chopping straw so frantically that he forgot everything but his work; and Kuba, returning from the wood, cried out aloud:

"Mercy! there will be enough of it for a week's fodder!" And then Antek woke up from his musings, threw the straw-cutter aside, stretched himself, and went into the hut.

"What must be will be," he reflected, "and I must speak to my father this day.—That blacksmith fellow is a lying traitor; his advice may be good, for all that. Nay, there must be something in it." He peeped in at his father's door, and at once drew back; a score of urchins were sitting there. Roch was teaching them, and paying great heed to their behaviour; going round with beads in hand, hearing their lessons, correcting them at times; at others



pulling one boy's ear or patting another's head, but for the most part sitting patiently and explaining the printed matter, or putting questions, which the children hastened to answer in chorus as fast as they could, gobbling like a troop of little turkeys when excited.

Hanka was getting dinner ready, and having a talk with her father, old Bylitsa, who seldom came, because he was always ailing and could hardly move about.

He sat close to the window, his chin and hands on his staff; hoary-headed, with a twitch of the lips and a treble voice like a bird's, accompanied by thin wheezing sounds in the windpipe.

"Have you breakfasted?" she inquired.

"To say true, Veronka forgot me."

"Oh, she even starves her dogs! they often come to me for food," she cried. Her elder sister and she had been on bad terms ever since last winter, when their mother had died, and Veronka seized on all she had left, refusing to give anything up; which had estranged them.

He took her part in a feeble voice. "They have not too much for themselves. Staho threshes at the organist's, where he gets food and a score of kopeks daily besides. And there are many mouths to feed in the cabin: the potato-patch cannot suffice for all. True, they have a couple of milch-cows and take butter and cheese to town, and get a few coppers; but she often forgets to give me my meals. Yet I do not want much . . . only a little every day, and at the right hour . . ."

"Then come to us in spring, since you are so ill off with that jade!"

"But I make no complaint, no fuss; only . . ." His voice died into silence.

"With us, you could tend the geese, and see to the children."

"Hanka," he said under his breath, "there is nothing that I would not do."

"There is room for you here; I should put up a bed for you and make you cosy."



"Oh, if I could but be with you, Hanka, and never go back to them, I would sleep in the cowhouse or the stable," he answered in a husky beseeching voice. "They took my feather-bed from me; she says the children have nothing to sleep on. It is true that they were cold, so I had them with me. But my sheepskin is all torn, and does not keep me warm at all; and where I sleep there is no fire, and she will not let me have any wood, and counts every spoonful that I eat, and sends me out a-begging, and I am so weak I can scarcely crawl to your house."

"Good God! and you never told me this was so!—Why?"

"How could I? she is my daughter!—And he is a good-hearted man, but very little in the house.—How could I?"

"She is a hag! She took half the land and half the cabin, and the other things. . . . So that's the board and lodgings she promised to give you! We must go to law: they were bound to let you have food and firing, and clothing too.—And we were to give twelve roubles a year: have we not kept our promise, say?"

"Surely! For you are upright folk.—But those few *zloty* that I have saved for my burial—I had to give them up too, I could not help it." He said no more but sat crouching in his place, more like a heap of rags than a human being.

After dinner, when the smith's wife came with her children and greeted Hanka, the old man took up a bundle prepared for him by his daughter, and vanished unnoticed.

Boryna had not come home to dine.

The smith's wife was determined to see him, nevertheless, though she should have to wait till nightfall. Hanka had set up a loom near the window, where she set to work, drawing the woof of hempen thread across the warp assiduously, and but seldom and timidly taking part in the talk between Antek and his sister. His conversation with her about their grievances did not last long, however; for Yagustynka dropped in, saying in a casual tone:

"I have just come here from the organist's, where they need me for the washing. Matthias was there only just now, together with Yagna, to invite them to the wedding.

They are coming. Yes, everyone to his people: the rich to the rich. They have asked the priest also."

"What! have they dared His Reverence!" Hanka exclaimed.

"Is he, then, so sacred a being? They asked him, and he said he might possibly come. Why not? Is the girl ill-looking? will the food be bad? and will there be little to drink? The miller and wife and daughter have promised. Ho, ho! There will not have been such a wedding since Lipka was Lipka!—I know, for I shall be cooking with Eva—her from the miller's. Ambrose has killed a pig for them, and sausages are making now . . ." She broke off abruptly, noticing that no one asked any questions, or spoke at all. She looked round at them as they sat gloomily there, and, eyeing them attentively, cried out:

"I say! there is a storm brewing here!"

"Storm or no storm, what is that to you?" the smith's wife answered, so tartly that Yagustynka was offended, rose, and went over to Yuzka in the other lodgings, who (the children having just departed) was setting chairs and benches in order.

"Father is not likely to grudge himself anything," the smith's wife remarked, in an aggrieved tone.

"Oh, he can well afford it!" Hanka rejoined, and broke off abruptly, seeing Antek look fiercely at her.—They sat waiting in almost complete silence. From time to time a word was said; then that dull, crushing, ominous speechlessness came over them once more.

"He must have cash enough: he is always selling things, and never spending."

Antek's only rejoinder to his sister's words was a wave of the hand; and he went out of the room to get some fresh air. He was feeling ever more and more uneasy; nor could he tell why. He now expected his father, and felt impatient at the delay, yet glad in his heart not to have met with him yet.—"It is not the land you are angry about, it is Yagna!"—Those words, uttered by the smith the day before, now suddenly came back to him.—"He is a lying dog!"



was the cry of rage which burst from his lips. And he set to work at the outer wall which was to protect the hut from the side of the courtyard. Vitek brought him litter from the heap; Antek drove in the laths to form the wall, and rammed the litter down inside it; but his hands were trembling, he had to stop working more than once, and lean against the cabin walls, and look out through the bare leafless trees over the pond to Yagna's hut.—No, it was not love that was now growing within him, but anger and hatred in numberless billows! She, the jade—she, the hateful one!—They had thrown her a bone, and off she went after it!

Such were his thoughts. But then there swept over him remembrances coming up—whence, he knew not—laying siege to his heart, clinging to his mind, even visible to his senses . . . and the sweat bedewed his brow, his eyes flashed, a thrill ran through him.—Ah, there in the orchard! Ah, then in the forest! And again, when they once were coming from town together!

All at once he reeled; he again saw that burning face, those deep-blue eyes, those wondrous full red lips; and he heard her quick-drawn breaths of passion, and her voice, low and husky with love and rapture, calling to him: "Antek! Antek!" And she was again bending towards him, very close—he felt her touch him with all her throbbing self! . . . But he rubbed his eyes to drive away that too sweet phantom, and his implacable resentment again oozed icily from his heart, as the drops fall from the icicles under the eaves, when the spring sun shines upon them, and love awakens once more; within his soul, agonized yearning lifted her thorn-crowned head once more—a yearning so bitter that he would fain have eased it by clutching at any pain whatsoever, or by shrieking to rouse the dead!

"May a brimstone thunderbolt strike her!" he cried out; but, suddenly recollecting himself, he cast a sharp glance round, fearing lest Vitek should have understood whom he meant.

He had spent those three last weeks in a fever of ex-



pectancy, awaiting the happening of some miracle. As for him, he could do nothing, prevent nothing!

And of late, insane thoughts had often surged up in his mind, insane resolves. Often had he gone out to meet her, and many a night had he watched outside her cabin, in the rain and the cold. But she had not come out.—She shunned him!

No, no, no! Every instant he grew more angry against her, against the whole framework of things. She was his father's!—A strange woman, an adventuress, a thief who had robbed him of his land, the most precious of all possessions! Smite her he would—aye, beat the life out of her!

More than once he had determined to confront his father, and tell him to his face: "You cannot have Yagna; she is mine!" But the very thought made his hair stand on end.—What would his father, what would all the village say?

So now she, that same Yagna, was to be his stepmother—his mother . . . of a sort! How could that be? Was it not a sin, a most grievous one? He was afraid to think of it: the thought of some awful judgment of God at hand made his heart die within him. . . . And yet, to say nothing—to bear all this within himself, as one bearing in his bosom coals of fire that burned to the bone—that was beyond the endurance of man!

And the wedding was but a week away!

"Master is coming," Vitek cried; and Antek felt he was shaking with dismay.

It was getting dark,

It was getting cold, too; the ground was freezing, the air eager and nipping, but clear as usual when a frost is setting in, and wafting sound so well that the bellowing and trampling of the cattle driven to water, the creaking of the gates and bucket-dippers, the noises of the children and the dogs, were all heard distinctly across the pond. From some windows, there gleamed lights already, throwing athwart the waters their long, broken, quivering reflections; while, from behind the woods, the huge red full moon was slowly ascending.

Boryna, attentive to farm matters, came into the yard, and rated Kuba and Vitek soundly for having let the calves stray from their stalls and wander to the cows' mangers; so, when he entered the house, his visitors were awaiting him. They said nothing, but just gave one glance, and looked down, as he stopped short in the middle of the room, eyed them, and asked scornfully:

"All here? What, come to sit in judgment, hey?"

"No, indeed," the smith's wife returned, timorously; "we only come to you with a petition."

"But why is your goodman not here?"

"He was very busy, and could not come."

"Aha! Busy . . . yes." He smiled knowingly, threw his capote aside, and pulled off his boots. All remained tongue-tied the while, uncertain how to begin. The smith's wife cleared her throat and drew her children closer; Hanka, on the threshold, was suckling her little boy, and casting uneasy looks at Antek, who sat by the window thinking what he should say, and shaking all over with emotion. Yuzka alone was calm, peeling potatoes by the fire-place.

"Now, then, say what you have to say," the old man cried sharply, irritated by the silence.

"Better you, Antek, should speak first—about that settlement: we shall follow," the smith's wife stammered.

"The settlement? It is made, and the wedding is to be on Sunday: that I can tell you."

"We know, but we came for another reason."

"What is it?"

"You have settled six whole acres!"

"I chose to: if I choose, I can settle everything on her, and this instant!"

"You may, if all belongs to you," Antek retorted.

"And whose else is it—whose?"

"Your children's. Ours."

"That's nonsense. Mine the land is, and I can do with it as I please."

"Or not yours, and not to do as you please."

"Will you prevent me—you?"

"I shall . . . we all shall; and if not, we have the law to protect us." He could no longer control himself, and was raging.

"Ah! you do threaten me with the law, forsooth?—Hold your peace ere I am angered, or you'll rue it."

"Wrong us ye shall not!" cried Hanka in a loud voice, rising to her feet.

"And what is't she wants—she?—She brought us three acres of sand, and one piece of canvas cloth: and she dares wag her tongue here!"

"You have given Antek still less: not even the land, his mother's dowry; we are as your farm-labourers!"

"But in return for your work you get all that three of my acres yield."

"For work that is worth the yield of more than twenty."

"If unfairly treated, go elsewhere and fare better."

Here Antek shouted: "We will not! The land is ours, come down from our grandsires and forefathers."

Old Boryna glared at him, but answered nothing. He seated himself by the fire and, taking up a poker, used it on the brands till the sparks flew on every side. He was flushed with passion; his hair again and again came tumbling into his eyes, phosphorescent like a wildcat's; but he had some self-control still left.

A long pause ensued, and the stillness of the room was broken only by the hurried breaths drawn there.

"We have naught against your marrying; marry, if you like."

"And if you have aught, much difference will it make to me!"

"Only revoke that settlement!" added Hanka, in tears.

"Oh, that peevish mother of dogs! Always chattering like a fool!" And he poked the fire so furiously that the sparks flew all about the room.

"Take heed! She is no wench of yours, that you should speak such words to her!"



"Why should she prate, then?"

"She has a right to speak!" Antek shouted; "she stands up for what is our due."

"If you will," the smith's wife murmured, "let the settlement stand, but settle the rest of your property on us."

"Look at that simpleton! Going to divide my land, eh? No, I'll never take board and lodgings from you.—I have spoken."

"We will not give in! We will have justice!"

"If I but take my stick to you, I'll give you justice!"

"Try but to touch us!—You'd not live till the wedding!"

And now the squabble began in earnest; they rushed forwards, threatening; they beat the table with their fists, they shouted aloud all their grievances, all their injuries. Antek, in his anger, forgot himself so far as again and again to clutch his father by the shoulder, even by the throat, so furious was he; but the old man was yet master of himself. He wished to have no fight, and merely pushed him aside, seldom replying to insults, and unwilling to have the whole village taking part in his affairs. But the noise and confusion in the room waxed louder and louder; for both the women were weeping and pouring forth invectives alternately, while the children screamed so that both Kuba and Vitek came round from the farm-yard and peeped in at the window.

Hanka, leaning against the chimney penthouse, here burst into a torrent of tears and words:

"Yes, we shall have to go out into the world and beg our bread! O Lord, good Lord! . . . we that have toiled like oxen! . . . What have we now of our labour? . . . Ah, God will avenge this wrong of ours! . . . His judgment will be upon you! . . . Six whole acres settled—and mother's clothing and beads given away . . . everything! And to whom, great God? . . . To that swine! . . . Oh! wanton and harlot as you are! For the wrong you are doing us, may you end in a ditch some day!"

"What do you say?" the old man shrieked, darting furiously towards her.

"That she is a harlot and a wanton—as all the village and all the world knows!"

"Woe betide you! I'll beat your foul mouth to pulp!" He seized and shook her; but Antek leaped forwards to protect her, and shouted in his turn:

"And I say it too: she is a wanton, a harlot, and anyone may know her that cares!"—But he said no more. Boryna, in a paroxysm of rage, struck him such a blow in the face that he fell with his head breaking the pane of a glazed press, which he brought to the floor with him. Springing up instantly, streaming with blood, he charged his father.

They both rushed at each other like mad dogs, with a mutual clutch, driving and being driven backward and forward about the room, pushing and hurling one another against the bed, the great trunk, the walls, till their heads rang again. A horrible outcry arose: the womenfolk tried to separate them, but they rolled down upon the floor, so closely gripped in hatred that they turned over and over, each strangling each, each crushing the other, as best he could.

By great good fortune, the neighbours ran in while it was time, and separated them.

Antek was hustled away to the other lodgings, and water dashed over him; he was faint with exhaustion caused by loss of blood, for the glass had gashed him very deep.

The old man had no hurt at all; only a slight tear in the short jacket he wore, and a few scratches on his face, that was livid with rage. . . . He swore at the folk who had come, shut the front door on them, and sat down by the fire.

But nothing could avail to calm him.

He could not put out of his memory the words uttered about Yagna: they stabbed him like a knife.

"That hound! I will never forgive him, never!" was the oath he then swore to himself. "My Yagna! how could he?"—But then he recalled what he had heard said of her in former times and disregarded. He turned hot, he felt as if he were choking, and a wretched sense of dejection



came over him. How, if his own son said such things, were people's mouths to be stopped? Oh, that villain! The very recollection of those words burned him like fire.

After Yuzka had cleaned away all the traces of the struggle, and given him his supper, though late, he attempted to eat, but could not, and laid his spoon down. "Have you given the horses their provender?" he inquired of Kuba.

"Of course."

"Vitek—where is he?"

"Gone for Ambrose, to see to Antek's head. His face is swollen like a pipkin," he added, hurrying out; for he had chosen this moonlight night to go out shooting.

"'When dogs have too much bread, each flies at t'other's head,'" he grunted.

The old man stumped down into the village, but refrained from visiting Yagna, though the light was gleaming bright from her window. He turned away just outside her door, and went round to the mill. It was a chilly star-besprinkled night, and so clear that the whole mill-pond shone like glittering quicksilver. Over the deserted roads the trees cast long swaying shadows. It was late; they were putting the lights out in the houses, whose white-washed walls now stood out more distinctly among the skeleton orchard trees. Silence and darkness had swallowed up all the hamlet: only the mill-wheel and the water clattered and babbled monotonously. Matthias walked on, crossing to the other side. As he went, his anger grew stronger, together with his hatred. When he got to the tavern, he sent for the Voyt, and they both drank till midnight. He could not, however, drown the gnawing pain within him. Only he then registered a resolve.

No sooner had he risen the next morning than he went round to the other lodgings. Antek was in bed, his face bandaged with a bloodstained rag.

"Get out of my home this instant!" he said, "and let no trace of you remain! If you want war, if you will go to law, then do so; bring an action, and get back your property! What you have sown of your own grain, you may



reap, when summer comes. And now, away with you! Let me set eyes on you no more! Do you hear?" he roared. Antek set about dressing slowly.

"By noon, you will have to be off!" he added, calling out to them from the passage.

Antek remained as dumb as though he had not heard.

"Yuzka, call Kuba: let him put the mare to the cart, and take them whither they want to go!"

"But there is something the matter with Kuba. He lies groaning on his pallet, and says he cannot rise at all, his lame leg hurts him so."

"A sluggard, who only wants to lie abed!" And Boryna saw to the farm-duties by himself.

Kuba nevertheless was seriously ill, but would not say what the matter was with him, though pressed by his master. As he lay, he uttered such groans that the horses came up to him, sniffed at his face and licked it, while Vitek brought him water in a pail, and secretly washed certain blood-smirched rags in the river.

Boryna, intent as he was on the departure of Antek and his family, noticed nothing of all this.

They departed.

Without clamour or disturbance, they packed everything, carried their belongings out, and made up their bundles; Hanka well-nigh swooning with distress; Antek refreshing her with drinks of water and hurrying her on, that they might be away—out of that father's house—as quickly as ever they could.

He would take no horse from his father, but borrowed one from Klemba, and took everything over to Hanka's parent, at the very end of the village and beyond the tavern.

Several peasants had come in from the hamlet, along with Roch as their leader, desirous of reconciling them; but to this neither father nor son would agree.

"No," said the old man; "let him try how he will enjoy his freedom, and bread of his own!"

Antek answered no word to their solicitations; but, lifting

his fist, he uttered such horrible maledictions that Roch turned pale and withdrew amongst the women, who were in numbers about the premises; partly to assist Hanka, but for the most part to air grievances aloud, and babble, and give advice.

When Yuzka, all in tears, gave dinner to her father and Roch, her brother and his family were off the place, together with all they had. Antek never even looked back at his hut; he only crossed himself, heaving a deep sigh; and whipping up the horse, put his shoulder to the cart, it being very heavily laden. He went plodding along, his face white, his eyes blazing with stubborn resolve, his teeth chattering as one in an ague: but never said one word. Hanka walked languidly after the cart, her elder son holding to her skirt and roaring, her younger one clasped to her bosom. Before them she drove a cow, a flock of geese, and two lean swine: and her voice was so loud in imprecations and mourning that folk came out of their houses, and followed her as in procession.

At Boryna's, the meal was eaten in sombre silence.

The old dog Lapa barked in the porch, ran after the cart, returned and howled. Vitek called it; but it paid no heed. It smelt the farm-yard, entered Antek's empty rooms, ran round them one or twice, rushed into the passage, barked again, whined, fawned on Yuzka, and again tore about as though distracted: then it sat down on its hind quarters with a strange air of imbecility—and finally made off, with its tail between its legs, on Antek's trail.

"Even Lapa has gone after them!"

"Do not fear, Yuzka," her father answered tenderly; "Lapa is coming back soon. They will have no food for him. Come, no silly puling, but prepare the other rooms: Roch is to live in them. Call Yagustynka to help you. . . . You must take household matters in hand now; being housekeeper, you'll have many a care on your head. . . . No, no! no whimpering, dear!" He took her head in both his hands, and stroked it, and drew her caressingly to his heart.

"When I go to town, I'll buy you a pair of shoes."

"Oh, will you, will you, Father?"

"Yes, I will indeed, and many another thing besides. Only be a good girl, and take care of the place."

"And will you buy me a caftan like Nastusia's?"

"Certainly, dear, I'll buy you one."

"And ribbons too?—But long ones . . . such as I shall want for your wedding-day."

"Say but what you need, little one, and you shall have it . . . all you want!"



## CHAPTER XI

“ARE you sleeping, Yagna?”

“How can I sleep? I woke at dawn . . . with the thought that I am to be married to-day.”

“You are sorry, darling, are you?” she whispered; there was in her heart a mingling of hope and fear.

“Wherefore? Shall I be sorry that I must leave your home, and go to my own?”

Dominikova, crushing down the pang which suddenly seized her at the words, did not reply at once. She rose from her bed, dressed herself carelessly, and went out to wake up the lads in the stable. These had overslept themselves somewhat, the “Unbinding of Hair”<sup>1</sup> having taken place in the cabin the evening before. It was broad daylight, and the morning, clad in hoarfrost, flooded the world with silvery splendour.

Dominikova washed her face in the passage, and went quietly about the house, ever and anon peeping at Yagna, whose face was scarcely discernible in the shades of the bedroom, dark as yet.

“Lie there, darling! lie there still! Lie for the last time in thy mother’s home,” she murmured, love and sorrowing pain contending within her many a time. What she had coveted so ardently, she had now: yet she felt such anguish that she could not but wince at the smart of it, and sat down upon the bed.—Boryna . . . a kind man, who would treat her daughter with due respect. . . . And Yagna could do whatever she liked with this man, who saw nothing in the whole world but her!

<sup>1</sup> As Polish peasant-girls’ tresses are cut after the wedding, they have a little domestic party the evening before, to which only girls are invited, and the tresses are then unbound, ready to be shorn.

—*Translator’s Note.*

No. It was not he that she dreaded, but the stepchildren.—Ah, why had he driven the Anteks from his home? Now, if ever, would they brew mischief and seek revenge. But yet, if he had not done so? . . . Antek at Yagna's side!—A sin against God might have ensued.—Well, there was no help for it now. The banns were published, the guests invited; the pig was killed, the settlement safely stowed away. . . . No, no, no! What would come of it had to come; and while Dominikova lived, she would suffer no wrong to be done to her daughter.—Having come to this final decision, she went out to rate the lads for their sloth.

When she returned, she thought to rouse her daughter too; but Yagna had fallen asleep again, and the quiet regular breathing of slumber was heard from her bed. Once more did the mother feel anxieties and uncertainties swoop down upon her, like hawks with talons tearing at her heart, screaming distrust, and predicting some vaguely awful impending doom. But she dropped on her knees by the window and, with red bleared eyes fixed upon the flushed dawn, prayed very hard for a long time. And she rose, full of strength to meet any fate that might come, no matter what!

"Now, Yagna dear, get up; it is high time. Eva is coming at once to cook, and we have so much to do still!"

"Is the weather fine?" the girl inquired, raising her heavy head.

"So fine that all the country round is glistening over with hoarfrost. The sun will rise presently."

Yagna, aided by her mother, was soon dressed. Then the latter, after due consideration, spoke thus:

"What I have told you before, I will repeat again. Boryna is a good, kind man; but you must take great care . . . not to make friends with any chance acquaintance, or let tongues ever again wag against you. People are curs: they love to bite.—You hear me, dear?"

"I hear, yes; but you speak as though I had not any judgment at all."

"No one is the worse for good advice.—See well to this:



Boryna must never be set at naught, but always treated with tender respect. An old man cares much more for that sort of thing than a young one does. . . . And who knows whether he may not settle all his land on you? or perhaps give you a big sum—from hand to hand?"

"For that I care nothing," she interrupted impatiently.

"Because you are young and inexperienced. Look round you: what is it men quarrel for, work for, and make every attempt to get? Why, what but property, property alone!—The Lord never, never made you for toil and suffering.—Whom have I laboured for all my life, if not for my Yagna?—And now I shall be alone—quite alone!"

"But the lads will not quit your side; they will always be with you."

"Of them I have as much joy as of the day that is no more!" She wept, and added, wiping her eyes: "You must also live in harmony with your husband's children."

"Yuzka is a kindly girl. Gregory will not be back from the army for some time yet. And—and . . ."

"Beware of the smith!"

"Why, he is on the best of terms with Matthias."

"If so, it is for some reason of his own: be sure of that.—The Anteks are worst of all; they will not be reconciled. . . . His Reverence wanted to make peace yesterday, but they would none of it."

"Oh, but Matthias is a wicked old man to drive them from his house!" Yagna burst out passionately.

"What's that—what do you say, Yagna? Do you know that Antek would have taken back the land from us—that he cursed you, and said of you things unfit to repeat?"

"Antek against me? Antek? They lie who told you so. . . . May their foul tongues drop out of their heads!"

"Oh! And what is it sets you so strongly on his side? Say!" she asked with a threatening look.

"Their being all against him! I am not a begging dog that fawns on all who toss him bread. He is ill-used, and I know it!"



"You would like to return the deed of settlement to him, would you not?"

Yagna could speak no further; a stream of tears fell from her eyes; she rushed into the inner room, bolted the door, and cried there for a long while.

Dominikova did not try to interfere. The scene had awakened new feelings of anxiety in her mind, but she had no time to brood over them. Eva came; the lads slouched into the passage; the last preparations and arrangements were now to be made.

The sun was up, and the morning-tide rolling on.

The frost of the previous night had been hard enough for the roadside pools and the borders of the pond to be coated with ice, and the quagmires to bear the weight of the lesser flocks.

Now it was growing warmer, though in the shadow and under the hedges the frost still reigned. The thatches dripped with crystal drops, and wreaths of smoke-like vapour were curling up from the marshes.

Not the least little cloud floated in the dark azure of the sky.

Nevertheless, crows hovering about the cabins, and cocks frequently crowing, foretold bad weather to come.

It was Sunday; and though the bells had not yet begun to ring, the whole village was like a hive of swarming bees. Half the inhabitants were smartening themselves up for the wedding of Boryna with Yagna.

In every cabin, turmoil and racket prevailed; everyone was getting ready, trying things on, and dressing carefully; and out of many an open window and door came the sounds of merry voices.

On Dominikova's premises, of course, everything was in seething tumult, as usual on such a day.

The cottage, freshly whitewashed, was noticeable from afar, having been decorated with green boughs in Whitsun-tide fashion. Already the day before, the boys had come to fix pine-branches on the thatched roof and where possible

along every chink in the wall. From the fence to the porch, fir-tree boughs had been likewise set up, so that the fragrance was like that of the woods in the springtime.

Within, the arrangements made were very fine indeed.

On the farther side of the house, generally used as a storeroom, a great fire had been made, and Eva from the miller's was cooking there with some neighbours and Yagustynka to help her.

All the furniture had been removed from the other side, the room whitewashed afresh within, the chimney-piece veiled with a great piece of blue drapery. Nothing remained but the holy images on the walls; but the lads had carried in stout benches and long tables, which they set up along the sides. The ceiling, with its age-darkened rafters, had been adorned with paper figures that Yagna had herself cut out. Matthias had fetched her coloured paper from town, out of which she had snipped many a fringed and variously coloured circle, and imitating flowers, and curiosities of different descriptions—as, for instance, a dog running after sheep, its master following it, staff in hand; or a church procession, with priest, banners flying, and images borne aloft—and so many other marvels of the same kind, it was impossible to remember them all! And all were well-shaped and artistic in appearance, and had been greatly admired the evening before, when they were unplaiting Yagna's tresses. She knew how to make many another thing besides—anything that caught her eye or fancy; and in all Lipka there was not a cabin without some cutting made by her hands.

Having partly dressed herself in the other room, she came out to paste the rest of her cuttings upon the walls beneath the holy images, there being no room anywhere else.

"Yagna! will you have done with those fancy things of yours? The people are assembling, the band is marching through the village: and that girl is amusing herself with drolleries!"

"Plenty of time, plenty of time," she returned briefly; but she now stuck no more cuttings, and busied herself



strewing the floor with pine-needles, laying the tables with fine linen cloth, exchanging a few words with her brothers, or strolling about the place and looking out at the scenery. But she felt no pleasure in all this: not the least. She was going to dance and hear the band play, and was fond both of music and of dancing: that was all. Her soul, like the present day of autumn serenity, was cloudless and radiant, but lifeless. Were it not that all things reminded her it was her wedding-day, she might even have forgotten that. At the "Unplaiting," the day before, Boryna had put in her hands eight strings of coral beads—all that his wives had left at their death. And now they lay at the bottom of her trunk: she had not even put them on. To-day she felt no interest in anything. Willingly would she have flown away somewhere—but where, she knew not! Everything teased her; and what her mother had told her about Antek recurred persistently to her mind. What! *be* speak evil of her? She could not, would not believe it: the very thought made tears start.—Yet, it might be! . . . Yesterday, she was washing linen; he had passed by, and never looked her way! In the morning, she was going with Boryna to confession. Antek, coming in their direction, had turned back as from a savage dog. . . . Well, then, let him snarl at her if he would; let him snarl!

She began to feel herself in indignant revolt against him. But a sudden flash of memory brought that evening back to her, when they had returned together from plucking cabages at his father's. The recollection went to her head, her mind was wrapped and plunged in flames all over; it revived so intensely that it was not to be borne. Thereupon, to make a diversion, she cried point-blank to her mother: "I'll have you know I won't let my hair be cut off after the wedding!"

"Here's a clever one for you! Who ever heard of a girl whose hair was not shorn after the wedding?"

"At manors, and in towns."

"Certainly. Yes, they—*they* have to keep their hair, to cheat the folk, and pass for what they are not.—Why



would you bring in a new order of things, you? Let the manor girls make laughing-stocks of themselves by all means; let them go about, hairy as Jewesses. They are fools, and they may. But you—no town rubbish, a daughter of the soil from grandsire and greatgrandsire—you have to do as has ever been done amongst our peasantry!—Ah, I know them, those town conceits and fancies!”

Yagna, however, stuck to her point. Eva, an experienced woman, who knew many a village, and year after year went on foot to Chenstohova with the pilgrim companies, tried her best to persuade the girl; so did Yagustynka, though according to her way seasoning her advice with jests and bitter railleries. At last she said:

“Keep your tresses, do; they will serve Boryna, when he beats you. He’ll twist them round his hand, and so use his stick better upon you. And then you will cut them off by yourself. . . . I knew a woman . . .” But here she broke off. Vitek had come to call her. She was staying with Boryna since Antek’s expulsion, Yuzka proving too young for a housekeeper. Now helping Eva in the cooking, she would once in a while run round to the house to see to things there, as the old man’s brain was topsyturvy that day. Ever since morning, Yuzka had been at the blacksmith’s, smartening herself; and Kuba lay continually ill in bed.

The lad had come in a hurry. “Kuba wants you sorely: pray come this instant.”

“Off at once!—Good friends, I shall just see what it is, and be back here directly.”

“Hurry, Yagna; we are expecting the bridesmaids,” said Dominikova warningly.

But she made no haste at all, seemingly in a drowsy fit. . . . Her work fell from her fingers, and she would stand sometimes gazing vacantly out of window. Her soul was as though turned to water within her—water that flowed hither and thither, and now and again splashed and broke on some rock of memory.

In the cottage, the hubbub was ever increasing, with the

constant arrival of many a dame—now a kinswoman, now a housewife: these, according to ancient custom, bringing Dominikova fowls, or a loaf of wheaten bread, cake, salt, flour, pieces of bacon, or a silver rouble wrapped up in paper—all these things as thank-offerings for the invitation, and to make up for the heavy expenses incurred.

Each of them drank a little nip of sweetened vodka, chatted a few minutes with the old dame, admired everything, and hurried away.

Dominikova herself superintended the cooking, cleared things away, and saw that everything was duly done; not omitting to scold her sons for laziness; and, indeed, they dawdled much, and each of them slipped out whenever he could into the village to the Voyt's, where the musicians and the bridesmen had gathered already.

Few people attended High Mass, and this vexed his Reverence, because folk had forgotten the Divine Service on account of a mere wedding. Which was very true; but people also said to themselves that such a wedding was not to be witnessed every Sunday.

All those invited came driving in at once after the noon-day meal from the neighbouring villages.

The sun, shedding a dim hazy splendour over the autumn fields, had begun to roll westward; the ground seemed shiny and glistening as if with dew, the pond shimmered tremulously, the roadside ditches had a glassy gleam; the whole landscape was soaked in the dying light and the cooling heat of the last autumn days.

Burning down like a candle, the day was slowly approaching extinction.

The village of Lipka, however, was inspired with all the animation of a fair.

No sooner had the Vesper bells rung for the first time than all the musicians at the Voyt's sallied forth into the road.

First came the fiddlers, each marching abreast with a flutist; then the bass-viol-players, and the drummers, to whose instruments there were little bells attached: all



adorned with flying ribbons, and advancing with elastic steps.

After the musicians walked a troop of eight: the two "proposers," who had arranged the match, and the six bridesmen. These were all handsome young fellows, slender as pine-trees, slim-waisted, broad-shouldered, enthusiastic dancers, audacious of speech, fond of a fray, and great sticklers for their rights: such were they all six, and all of good families, pure farmer's blood.

Together they marched, shoulder to shoulder, down the middle of the road, the ground echoing under the tramping of their boots: with such merry daredevil looks, and so gayly adorned, that they killed the whole scene—a vision of striped trousers glancing in the sun, of scarlet jackets, hats decked with bunches of floating ribbons, and white capotes, open and flapping in the breeze like wings.

Uttering shrill cries, and humming joyful tunes, on they dashed, tramping noisily in measure—a young pine-grove in motion and rushing with the blast!

The musicians played polonaises, going from hut to hut to call the wedding guests; here vodka was offered them, there they were asked in; elsewhere a song would answer to their tunes; while on all sides the folk came out, dressed in their best raiment, and went swelling the main body. And under the windows of the bridesmaids all sang in unison the following verse:

Lasses, lightly treading,  
Come ye to the wedding—  
Hear our gleeful tune!  
Hear our voices' chorus  
Join with flute sonorous—  
Hautboy and bassoon!  
Let the tankard clink now:  
Who is loth to drink now—  
He's a scurvy loon!  
Oy ta dana dana,  
Oy ta dana dana,  
Oy ta dana da!



And then they shouted so loud that they could be heard throughout the whole village, and beyond in the fields and the forests.

The folk had come out in front of their houses, into the orchards. Many who had not been invited joined the party, merely to look on and listen; so, before it had reached its destination, pretty nearly the whole village was round them, pressing and surging on every side, while the children ran on in front: a dense crowd, a swift and a noisy one.

Having brought the guests to the bridal cottage, playing them in with a joyful strain, they returned to fetch the bridegroom.

Vitek, who, brave in his short jacket adorned with ribbons, had accompanied the bridesmen, now ran fast before them.

"Master!" he cried through the window. "They are coming!" And off he ran to where Kuba lay.

They played a good while there before the porch. Boryna came out directly, threw the door wide open, and would have had them all in; but the Voyt and the Soltys took him by each arm and led him straight away to Yagna; for it was high time to go to church.

His gait was full of mettle, and he looked surprisingly young. Clean-shaven, with hair newly cut, and his wedding-suit on, he made a rarely handsome figure; besides which, portly and broad-shouldered as he was, the dignified expression both of his features and his whole outer man made him conspicuous from afar. He smiled and talked pleasantly with the young men who had come; especially with the smith, who managed to be always close to him.

They brought him in ceremony to Dominikova's, where the crowd made place for him; and, with tumultuous cries, and sounds of many instruments and songs, he entered the cabin.

Yagna was as yet invisible: the women were arraying her in the inner room, carefully watched and strongly bolted. For the young fellows knocked and battered at the door; they cut narrow slits in the partitions, and made careless

jests with the bridesmaids: whereupon rose great screaming, much laughter, and of old women's scolding not less.

The old dame, with her sons, received the guests, offered vodka, conducted the elders to the places reserved for them, and in short had an eye to everything.

All the guests were of high condition: no common men, but only men of property and of good family; and of these only the wealthiest. All were connected with the Borynas and the Paches by ties of family and friendship, or were at least acquaintances who had driven over from distant villages.

None of your Klembas, or your Vincioreks, none of your one-acre starvelings were there: nor any of the small fry that eked out their existence by working for others, and were the closest adherents of old Klemba!

"No dainties for dogs, and no honey for hogs," says the adage!

Presently the door opened; and the organist's wife and the miller's ushered Yagna into the big room. The bridesmaids formed a circle round her—a wreath of human flowers they were, all so beautifully dressed and so fair to see. And she—she stood in their midst, like a rose, the most fearless of them all; with head-dress of plumes and ribbons and silver and gold lace, she was like one of those images they carry in church processions; and they all stood mute before her.

Ah! since the Mazur was first danced, no one was ever more splendid!

Then did the bridesmen lift up their voices, growling from the depths of their throats:

Resound, O violin, resound!

(Yagna, now ask pardon of your mother!)

Resound, O flageolet, resound!

(Yagna, now ask pardon of each brother!)

Boryna came forward and took her hand. They both knelt, and Dominikova made the sign of the cross over them with an image, and then sprinkled them both with holy



water. Yagna, bursting into tears, fell at her mother's knees, embracing them, and the other women's too, as she begged pardon and took leave of them all. The women gathered her into their arms, passing her from one to another, and all wept much: Yuzka the most, thinking of her dead mother.

They all formed up before the house and marched off on foot, for the church was but one field away.

Then the bridesmen took possession of Yagna. She walked on with delight, smiling through the tears which still trembled in her lashes. She now was gay to see as a spring-blossoming bush, and riveted every eye. Her hair, braided over her forehead, bore above it a rich pile of gold spangles, and peacock's eyes, and sprigs of rosemary. Therefrom, down to her nape and shoulders, fell long ribbons of every hue; her white skirt was gathered at the waist in abundant folds; her corsage, of sky-blue velvet, was laced with silver; she wore great puffed sleeves to her chemise. Round her throat there was an abundant frill, embroidered with designs in dark-blue thread, and necklaces of coral and amber, row upon row, hung covering half her bosom.

Matthias was being led by the bridesmaids.

As the stalwart oak may be seen rising behind the graceful pine in the woods, so did he appear after Yagna's figure. There was in his gait a certain jaunty swing, and he shot glances on either side of the road: he fancied he had beheld Antek in the ruck.

Following him came Dominikova, with the "proposers," the smith and his family, Yuzka, the miller's and the organist's people, and all the persons of any note.

And following these came the whole village.

The sun was now hanging above the woods, red, enormous, flooding all the road, and the pond, and the huts, with its blood-red glow.

In the midst of this crimson conflagration they walked on slowly. It made the eyes blink to see them as they went—with ribbons and peacock plumes and flowers; gay in red trousers, petticoats of orange tints, rainbow kerchiefs,



snowy capotes: just as if a whole field full of flowers in bloom had arisen and moved forward, swaying in the wind!

Aye, and singing too! For again and again the high treble of the bridesmaids' voices would strike up the ditty:

On the clattering wagons go,  
And my heart is full of woe,  
Alas!

Round you while our songs rise glad,  
You, O Yagna, you are sad,  
Alas!

All the way, Dominikova was in tears, her eyes fixed upon Yagna alone.

Ambrose was already lighting the tapers in church when they came.

They formed in ranks—two and two—and proceeded toward the high altar, just as the priest was coming out of the sacristy.

The wedding was soon over: his Reverence had to visit a sick man in haste. When they left the church, the organist played them out with Mazurs, Obertases, and Kuyavy dances, till their feet beat time of themselves; and more than one was on the point of singing aloud, but luckily remembered where he was.

They returned pell-mell, and very noisily, for bridesmen and bridesmaids were singing together.

Dominikova got to her home first and, when the company arrived, was there to welcome the newly married couple on her threshold, and offer them the hallowed bread and salt; then she had to receive the whole company a second time, embrace them all, and ask them in once more!

In the passage, the music was striking up. So, on passing the threshold, everyone made a partner of the first woman he met, to perform the stately polonaise that was being played. At once, like a many-coloured serpent, a chain of couples, following each other about the room, waved and twined, twisted and turned back decorously, struck the floor with dignity, swayed to and fro in graceful undula-

tion, placed, swam, wheeled about, one after another in serried ranks, Boryna with Yagna leading off!

The lights placed on the chimney penthouse flickered, and the very walls seemed like to fall asunder with the forceful gravity of this solemn dance, performed with such dignified grace.

This was the introduction, and lasted but some minutes. Then began the first dance, in honour of the bride, and according to the usages and customs of old days. All present squeezed themselves into corners, or huddled against the walls; and the young men made a wide circle, within which she danced. As she stepped out, she felt the blood tingling in her veins; her dark-blue eyes shone; her white teeth gleamed; her face was flushed; she danced persistently, and for a long time, for she was obliged to give each partner at least one turn round the room, and dance with all.

The musicians worked hard—worked till they felt worn out: but Yagna seemed to have but just begun. The flush on her face deepened, she turned and whirled more impetuously than ever; her ribbons fluttered and rustled as she went by, lashing those near her on the cheek; and her skirt, expanding to the streaming air, spread out and bellied wide around her.

The young men, delighted, beat time on the tables, and shouted in eager excitement.

It was only after all the others that she chose her bridegroom. Boryna, who had been waiting so long, now leaped forward, pouncing on her like a forest lynx, seized her waist, whirled her round like a hurricane, and cried to the players:

"Now, boys, the Mazur—and with a will!"

All the instruments sounded with might and main; the whole room was in a fever.

Holding Yagna in a strong grip, Boryna lifted the skirts of his capote over each arm, settled his hat upon his head, clicked his heels together, and set off, swift as the wind!

Ah! but how he danced! Now turning round and round, now with a backward step, now bringing his foot down as



if he would stamp the floor to shivers—then sidling with Yagna, and sweeping her on, and whisking her hither and thither, and whirling her so that they twain formed but one indistinct mass, looking for all the world like a spindle full of yarn, spinning about a room; and from each of them there came forth a full blast of power and force.

Furiously, unceasingly, the players went on playing the Mazur dance!

The crowds in the corners and at the door looked on in silent wonder: Boryna was so indefatigably active, and ever at higher and higher pressure, that he instilled not a few with riotous boisterousness, even to beating the measure with their feet; and some of the hottest heads, no longer restrained by decorum, seized a girl and danced about with her.

Yagna, though brawny and well-knit, soon had to give in; he felt her weakening in his arms, and immediately ceased from dancing, and led her to the inner room.

"What a splendid fellow you are!" the miller cried out. "Henceforth you are my brother!—Ask me to be godfather at the first christening, I pray you!" And he put his arm round Boryna's neck. Soon they were on very familiar terms, for the music had stopped and refreshments were handed round.

Dominikova and her sons, with the smith and Yagustynka, now glided swiftly about, bearing bottles and clusters of glasses, and drank with each one. Yuzka and the friends of the old dame carried pieces of bread and cake about in sieves to the guests.

And the tumult grew and increased.

On a bench near the window sat the miller, with Boryna, the Voyt, the organist—all the notables in the place besides; and there a bottle of rum—not of the worst—was circulating among them.

Many were also standing about the room in groups, talking loudly to anyone they met, as they felt inclined; and the vodka glasses were in requisition.

The inner room was lit by the organist's great lamp, lent



for the occasion. The housewives, with the organist's wife and the miller's at their head, had gathered there, and sat on chests and benches strewn with pieces of woven wool. They held their heads up with great dignity, sipped their mead by tiny droplets, crumbled the sweet cake with dainty fingers, and very rarely threw in a word or two, but listened attentively while the miller's wife told them all about her children.

The very passages were quite full. Some tried to invade the other side; but Eva drove them out. They proved too greedy for the dishes, the appetizing scent of which had filled the house, and was making many a mouth water.

The young people then dispersed all about the premises, in the yard and the orchard. The night was chilly, but serene and starlit. Here they strolled, disporting themselves in merry guise; and all the place echoed with laughter, shouts, and running to and fro, one chasing another among the trees. So the elders cried a warning to them from the window:

"Are ye seeking flowers by night, girls?—Beware lest ye lose what is more than any flower!"

But who paid heed to them?

Yagna and Nastusia were now walking about the big room, their arms round each other's waists, whispering together, and ever and anon bursting into laughter. Simon, Dominikova's eldest son, was watching them, with eyes glued to Nastusia, and frequently going to her with vodka and attempting conversation.

The blacksmith had dressed up most grandly, having on a black capote, and trousers over which the boots were drawn. He slipped about with great activity, was everywhere, drank with everybody, walked to and fro and talked; and his red head and freckled face were never long on the same spot.

The young people danced several times, but not long, nor with much animation. They were looking forward to the supper.

The old men, on their side, were deep in debate, the Voyt

raising his voice higher and higher, striking the table with his fist, and laying down the law:

"I, the Voyt, have said it: you may take it from me. I, a man in office, have received a paper commanding me to call a meeting, and order half a kopek per acre to be voted by every landowner for educational purposes."

"You, Peter, may vote even five kopeks an acre if you like: we won't!"

"No, that we will not!" one of the men roared.

"But I am making you a statement as an official!"

"We do not care for such schools as those," Boryna remarked; and the others assented in chorus.<sup>1</sup>

"In Vola," said one, "there is a school which my children attended for three winters running. What is the result? They cannot even read in a prayer-book.—Devil take such teaching!"

"Let the mothers teach prayers at home; prayers have naught to do with studies. I, the Voyt, tell you this!"

"Then what are schools for?" grumbled the man from Vola, rising.

"I will tell you, I the Voyt: but listen . . ."

Here he was interrupted by Simon, who cried aloud to them all that the trees of the clearing sold to the Jews had already been branded by them, and that they would have them cut down as soon as the sledges could run.

"Brand the trees they may: to fell them will be harder!" Boryna put in.

"We shall complain to the commissary."

"Who is hand in glove with the Squire?—No: let us go in a body and drive the woodmen off."

"They shall not hew down one single sapling!"

"Matthias, drink to me! Now is no time for holding councils. A tipsy man will even defy God!" So cried the miller, filling Boryna's glass. The talk was as little to his

<sup>1</sup>The reader should bear in mind that this book was published before the War, when only schools where Russian was taught were permitted by the government, and Polish was not learned except in secret.—*Translator's Note.*

taste as the threats were; for he had an agreement drawn up with the Jews, and the trees were to go to his sawmill.

They drank and left their places; the tables were now to be laid for supper, and all the needful things were being brought in.

The farmers, however, still stuck to their forest grievance, which was a great wrong done to them. They formed a group, and with lowered voices (so that the miller might not overhear them) determined to thresh the matter out at Boryna's.

At this juncture, Ambrose came in, and went straight to them. He had come late, having had to go with his Reverence to a sick person three villages away, in Krosnova. So now he set to drink energetically, to make up for lost time. Vainly: for at that very moment a chorus of elderly women struck up the song:

Bridesmen, about, about! With you it rests  
Round the spread tables now to bring the guests!

To which they replied, having given the signal by striking on the benches:

Lo, we have called them: they are ready here  
Your spread to taste, if it be but good cheer.

The guests, now straggling in to table, took their seats on the benches.

The newly married couple had the first places, and all the others sat about them in order of precedence, as they were higher in standing, in possessions, or more advanced in age—from the elders to the girls and children. Tables had been set up along three of the walls, and yet there was scarce room for them all. The bridesmen and the musicians remained standing, the former to serve the guests.

There was a hush. The organist stood up and said a prayer aloud; after which, a glass went round, with the sentiment: Health and enjoyment!

The cooks and bridesmen then bore in a huge and deep dish of smoking food, singing the while:



Friends, we bring you dainty food:  
Fowls in rice-soup boiled and stewed!

And, carrying in the second dish:

Tripe with pepper, spiced and hot:  
He's a fool that likes it not!

The musicians, stationed near the fire-place, played various tunes very softly, to give more savour to the food.

All the company ate with becoming refinement, and deliberation; few spoke at all, and for some time the room resounded only with the sound of munching and the clatter of spoons. When they had to some extent slaked their appetites, the smith set another bottle in circulation; and now they began conversing (though in low tones) to one another across the table.

Yagna ate scarcely anything at all. In vain did Boryna urge and coax her, entreating her as one entreats a child to eat. She could not even swallow the meat before her; she was so hot, so tired!

"Yagna, are you content, sweet? Most beautiful Yagna, you will be as happy with me as ever you were with your mother. . . . Yagna, you will be a lady—a lady! I'll hire a girl, that you may not be overworked."—He spoke in hushed tones, and looking with love into her eyes, caring not for what folk might say; and they began to make fun of him openly.

"He looks like a cat after bacon!"

"How the old fellow flaunts his wantonness! Beside him, a cock is nothing at all."

"Oh, he is enjoying himself, Grandfather Boryna is!"

"As a dog does out in the frost," old Simon here muttered spitefully.

All held their sides with laughter, and the miller laid his face down on the table and beat it with his fists for sheer joy!

Once more the cooks entered, proclaiming:

Here is a dish of Turkish wheat,  
Cooked with plenty of lard, for lean folk to eat!

"Yagna, just bend over to me, I'll tell you a thing," the Voyt said, plucking at her dress behind her bridegroom, whose next neighbour he was.

"I would be your child's godfather," he cried, laughing, and gloating over her with greedy eyes.

At this, she grew very red; and the women, seeing this, fell a-laughing and jesting yet more facetiously, some setting to explain to her how she ought to behave to her husband.

"You'll have to warm a feather-bed for him every evening before the fire, or he'll be cold as ice."

"And especially see he has much fat to eat: it will keep him in good condition."

"And pet him well, with your arms round his neck."

"And drive him with a gentle hand, that he may not know he is driven at all!"

So they babbled on, each sentence freer than the last, as happens when women have taken too much, and let their tongues run away with them.

All in the room were shaking with merriment, and things at last went so far that the miller's wife set to lecturing them on their duties towards the girls and little ones present; and the organist pointed out how grievous a sin it was to cause others to offend by evil example.

"What? is this bellows-blower forbidding people every pleasure in life?"

"Being close to the priest, he thinks himself a saint!"

"Let him stop his ears, an it like him not." And more unpleasant cries began to be heard, for he was disliked in the village.

"We have a wedding to-day, and therefore, my good people, I, your Voyt, assure you it is no sin to enjoy yourselves, laugh at things laughable, and make merry."

"And our Lord Himself used to go to weddings and drink wine," Ambrose added seriously; but no one made

out what he said, as he was now tipsy, and sitting by the door besides. Then all fell to talking, joking, clinking glasses, and eating more and more slowly, in order to get more compactly filled up; some even, to make room for the most food possible, undid their girdles, and sat straight and stiff.

Again the cooks entered, with the following couplet:

It grunting, squealing, rooting once about the garden ran:  
But now, for all the harm it did, 'twill pay the husbandman!

"Well, they have done the thing grandly!" the people declared.

"Truly, this wedding must come at least to a thousand *zloty*!"

"Oh, she can well afford it: has she not got six acres of land thereby?"

"Just look at Yagna! Is she not gloomy as night?"

"As a set-off, Boryna's eyes are shining like a wildcat's."

"Say, like tinder, my friend—rotten tinder!"

"Aye, the man will weep over this day yet."

"No. He is not of the weeping sort. Of the cudgelling, rather."

"Just what I said to the Voyt's wife, when she told me the marriage had been settled."

"Ah, I wonder why she is not here to-night."

"Out of the question. Her child may be due any day."

"But I'd lay my head that in no long time—say, before the Carnival begins—Yagna will be again running after the lads."

"Matthew is only waiting for that."

"I know. Vavrek's wife overheard him say so in the tavern."

"Because he was not asked to the wedding."

"Yes. The old fellow would have had him, but Dominkova was against it.—All the folk know why, do they not?"

"Well, all say so; but what has anybody seen?"

"Bartek Koziol saw them in the wood last spring."



"He is a liar and a thief: Dominikova accused him of stealing a pig, and what he says may be mere spite."

"But others too—there be others that have eyes."

"All this will end ill . . . you will see. 'Tis no affair of mine, but to my mind, Antek and his family have been unjustly dealt with."

"Of Antek, too, people talk—say they have been seen together here and there."—The voices dropped lower as the spiteful talk went on, leaving no shred of reputation on any of the family, and the more unmerciful for their hostess as they had more pity for her two sons.

"Is't not a sin?—Simon, a man wearing mustachios—thirty, if a day—and she will not let him marry, nor leave the house: and for the slight fault she raises a tempest!"

"It is indeed a shame: such strapping lads, and doing all the woman's work!"

"So that Yagna, forsooth, may not soil her hands!"

"Each of them has five acres of his own, and might marry at his ease!"

"With so many unmarried girls around them!"

"Yes, yes; your own poor Martianna, waiting for ages, and the land quite close by Paches'!"

"You let her alone! See rather to your girl Franka, lest she come to grief with Adam!"

"Those great oafs!—Afraid to leave their mother's apron-strings!"

"They are beginning: Simon has been all the evening staring at Nastka."

"Their father was of the like mould: I remember well.—Aye, and the old woman was in her time no better than Yagna."

"As the root is, so the boughs; as the mother, so the daughter."

The music ceased, and, supper being over, the musicians went to refresh themselves in the kitchen. But after a time the noise waxed even louder than before, and the whole place seethed with uproar: all talking, ranting, shouting

away one to the other across the tables, and no one able to make out what was said.

At the close of the meal, the most select guests were offered a drink compounded of mead and spices, while the others got strong vodka and beer in abundance.

By this time, but few were well aware of what they were drinking, being too far gone and in a blissful state. They made themselves comfortable, and unbuttoned their capotes to be cooler; beat the tables with their fists till the dishes jingled, embraced each other, either round the neck or clutching at the shirt-collar; and they talked freely, unbosoming themselves and telling all their sorrows as if they had been brothers.

"'Tis ill living here on earth! Things are out of gear with mankind, and we have naught but grief!"

"Aye, men are like dogs, snapping at one another for a bone."

"No consolation, save when neighbour meets neighbour over a glass, and they take counsel, and make complaint; and if any has wronged or been wronged, he is forgiven and forgives!"

"As even now, at this wedding-feast: but, ah! for one day only!"

"Ah! To-morrow will come, though we call him not! You'll not shun him, save in God's hallowed Acre. . . . Yea, he will come and seize you, and lay on you his yoke, and smite you with the whip of poverty; and you, O man! must pull . . . even till the yoke be bloodstained."

"What is't aggravates our misery, setting men one against the other, like dogs quarrelling for a fleshless bone?"

"Not poverty alone, but an Evil Power; and they then are blinded by him, discerning not good from evil."

"Truly so; and he bloweth upon our souls as one bloweth on half-quenched embers; and he causeth greed, malice, and all wickedness to burst out into flame!"

"Yes; for he that is deaf to the commandments hath a quick ear for the music played in hell."

"It was otherwise of old days.—Then was there obedience, and respect for old men, and concord."

"And each man had land, as much as he could till; and pastures, and meadows, and the forest."

"Who in those days ever heard of taxes?"

"Or was there anyone that purchased timber? He had but to drive to the wood and take all he needed, though it were the best pine or oak. The property of the Squire was the peasants' property too."

"And now it belongs to neither, but to the Jews, or to men still worse."

"The foul carrion! (I have drunk to you: drink you to me! . . . They are now established as on land of their own! (Your health, Brother!) . . . To drink vodka is not a sin, if only at the proper season and with brothers: this is a wholesome thing, it cleanses the blood and drives away distempers."

"Who drinks at all, should drink one quart complete—likewise, who makes merry, should do it all Sunday long.—But have you work to do? Man, do it with all your might, grudge not your force, but put forth all your strength. And if ill things come to pass—if your wife be taken, if your cattle die, or your home burn down—why, 'tis the will of God. Do not rebel: what will it avail you to lament, poor creature as you are? Be patient, therefore; trust in God's mercy. Aye, and if the worst should hap, and should grim Cross-Bones stare you in the face and clutch your throat, attempt not to escape, which is more than you can do; all is in the hand of God!"

"Verily, who is to know the day when the Lord shall declare: 'Thus far, O man, is thine: what is beyond is mine?'"

"It is so of a truth. As lightning flashes, so are the decrees of God: and none, be he a priest, be he a sage, can know them till they fall, as ripe corn falls out of the ear."

"Man, you have to know but one thing—to do your duty, live as God commands you, and not look too far



ahead.—Surely our Lord prepares the wages of His servants, and pays most strictly what is due to each.”

“By these laws did the Polish people stand of old, and they are for ever and ever, Amen.”

“Aye, and by patience shall we prevail against the gates of hell.”

Thus they discoursed together, with not infrequent libations, everything pouring out all he felt in his heart, all that had long stuck in his throat and stifled him. Ambrose talked the most of all and the loudest.

At the very end, Eva and Yagustynka came in with great ceremony, bearing in front of them a large ladle, tricked out and beribboned. A musician who followed accompanied them on his fiddle, while they sang:

Ere you quit us, here come we;  
'Fore you both your cooks you see:  
Pray forget us not, good men:  
For each dish give stivers three;  
For our seasoning stivers ten!

The company had eaten plentifully, and drunk yet more; their hearts were warmed by good cheer, and many a man tossed even silver coins into the ladle as it passed.

They then slowly rose from table, and went out, some to breathe the fresh air, some to resume their conversation in the passages or in the great room; some gave way to enthusiastic demonstrations of friendship; and more than one reeled about, running his head against the walls or some other man, butting like rams.

Only the Voyt remained at the board with the miller, both quarrelling with intense fury, and about to fly at each other like two hawks, when Ambrose came to reconcile them, offering more vodka.

“Back to your church porch, old beggar,” the Voyt snarled at him, “and hold yourself aloof from your betters.”

So Ambrose walked off in dudgeon, hugging the bottle to his breast, stumping noisily and seeking someone to drink and talk with as a friend.

The young people had dispersed about the orchard, or were walking arm-in-arm along the road, with much horse-play, and chasing of one another, and shouting. The night was serene; the moon hung over the pond, which glittered so bright that the feeblest circles tremulous on its surface were distinctly visible, moving like snake-coils in silence, responsive (as it seemed) to the light that struck on them from above. The frost was pretty hard, the road-ruts were crisp underfoot, the roofs rime-crust and hoary. It was in the small hours, for the first cock-crow had already been heard.

Meanwhile they set the great room in order for dancing again.

Rested and refreshed, the players now again, in subdued strains, called the guests together.

Yagna had been taken to the private room by the matrons, Boryna sat with Dominikova close to the door, the elders took seats on benches and in corners, where they discussed various matters, and only the girls stood about the room besides, giggling together: a pastime which soon tired them, and they decided on starting some games, "to stir the boys up a little."

First there was the game, "Fox goes out to make his round; both his hands and feet are bound."

Yasyek, nicknamed Topsy-turvy, was dressed up as Fox, in his sheepskin turned inside out. He was a silly fellow, a simpleton, and the laughing-stock of them all. Though a full-grown man, he played with children, and was in love with all the girls and foolish beyond measure: but, being an only child with ten acres of his own, he was invited everywhere. Yuzka Boryna was his quarry, the Hare. And they laughed; Lord, how they laughed!

At every step, Yasyek stumbled and fell down, sprawling, with a thud like a log. The others, too, put out their feet to make him fall; and Yuzka got out of his way with perfect ease: she sat up quite as a hare does, and imitated to perfection the way its lips move.

Then came "Quails."



Nastka was leader, and so nimble that no one could catch her till she let them (in order to dance a measure with someone).

Finally, Tomek Vahnik was made up for a Stork, having a sheet over his head and a long stick which he held under it for beak; and he clack-clack-clacked like a real stork, so well that Yuzka, Vitek, and all the youngsters ran after him, calling (as they do to the live bird):

Klek, Klek, Klell!  
Thy mother's in hell!  
What does she there?  
Cook children's fare!  
What was her sin?  
That her little ones' bellies had nothing in!

And the hullabaloo was great; for he ran after them, and pecked with his beak, and flapped his wings violently.

These games lasted but an hour, when they had to make way for other observances.

Now the married women brought Yagna out of the private room, covered all over in a white wrapper, and seated her in the centre, on a kneading-trough on which a feather-bed had been put. The bridesmaids thereupon rushed forward as though to snatch her away, but the men kept them off: and at last they formed a group opposite, intoning a sad and plaintive chant:

Where is your wreath, oh, where  
Your bridal wreath so fair?  
Henceforth, to man's will bowed,  
A cap, your locks to shroud,  
You on your head must bear!

The matrons then uncovered her.

She was seen wearing the cap of the married women over the thick plaits of her tresses; yet in this disguise she appeared still more fascinating than before.

To the slow strains of the band, the whole assembly, young and old, struck up the "Hop-Song" in one grand



unison of gladness. This ended, she was taken over by the matrons alone, to dance with them. . . . Yagustynka, by this time much heated, set her arms akimbo, and flung this impromptu verse at her:

Oh! had I known this day would see  
My Yagna wed a widower,  
A wreath I would have woven thee  
Of naught but prickly juniper!

After which came others, yet more biting than the first.

But little note was taken of them; for the musicians had struck up for the greatest performance of all; and forward now came the dancers, and the trampling of many feet was heard. They crowded thickly, couple close to couple, cheek by jowl, moving ever more swiftly as the dance went on. Capotes flew open and flapped wide, heels stamped, hats waved—now and then a snatch of song burst forth—the girls hummed the burden, “da dana,” and tore on more quickly still, and swayed in measure in the mighty, swirling, headlong rush! No one could any longer distinguish his neighbour in the throng; and when the violins burst forth in quick sharp volleys of clean-cut separate notes, a hundred feet echoed on the floor at once, a hundred mouths gave tongue, a hundred dancers, seized as by a cyclone, whirled round and round; and the rustling of capotes, skirts, kerchiefs waving about the room, was like the flight of a flock of many-coloured birds. On they went, on continually—dancing without the slightest pause for breath, the floor clattering like a drum, the walls vibrating, the room a seething cauldron. And the rapture of the dance waxed greater, greater yet.

Then came the moment to perform rites which are always gone through when the bride puts aside her crown of rosemary.

First, Yagna had to pay toll, on entering the matrons' set!

Immediately afterwards, another ceremony was gone through. The men had a long rope, woven of the straw of

unthreshed wheat, of which they made a large ring, carefully held and guarded by the bridesmaids, Yagna standing up in the middle. Whoever wished to dance with her was obliged to creep under it, tear her away by force, and tread a measure, though they scourged him all the time with cords, wherever they could. Finally, the miller's wife and Vahnikova made a collection, for "The Cap." The Voyt came first; he tossed a gold piece into the plate; after that, silver roubles tinkled like hail; lastly, paper ones, as leaves in autumn.

More than three hundred roubles were thus collected!

Dominikova, quite overcome to see so large a sum offered for Yagna's sake, told her sons to bring more vodka, with which she herself pledged her hosts, kissing her friends and weeping at their great kindness.

"Drink, my good neighbours, drink, dear friends, beloved brothers of mine. . . . I feel spring back in my heart again . . . ! Yagna's health . . . drink once more . . . once more . . ." And when she gave over, the smith drank with others, and her sons too, each separately; for the throng was very thick. Yagna too, thanking them heartily for their kindness, embraced the knees of the elders present.

The room was humming, the glasses circulating freely from hand to hand; everyone exhaled ardour and joy. Faces were crimson, eyes resplendent; hearts went out to hearts. They stood in knots about the room, drinking and talking blithely, each saying his say very loud, unheard by any, but not caring for that!—All felt at one; one joy united and penetrated them all! "Ye that have troubles, leave them for the morrow; take your fling to-night: enjoy friendly company, solace your soul! Our hallowed land, its summer spell of fruit-bearing over, is given rest by the Lord: even so is it meet that men should rest in autumn, when their field-work is done. Man, that have your corn-stacks piled and your granaries full of grain worth heaps of precious gold—rest you now from summer labour and toil gone by!"



So spake some, while others again revolved in their minds their troubles and their griefs.

To neither of these classes did Boryna belong. His eyes saw only Yagna, his heart swelling and throbbing with the pride of her beauty. Again and again would he throw *zloty* to the musicians, that they might not spare catgut: for the sounds were growing weak, as their zeal was flagging.

On a sudden, then, they thundered out an Obertas that made one quiver to the backbone. Boryna leaped to Yagna's side, caught her in a mighty grasp, and at once started such a dance as shook the planks beneath them. He wafted her down the room—back again—clanged on the floor with his horseshoe heels—knelt suddenly to her, and sprung up again in a flash—bore her about from wall to wall—roared out a solo which the instruments took up and accompanied, and still led the dance, while other couples imitated him, leaping, singing, stamping, and all with ever-increasing rapidity: as if as many spindles full of particoloured wools were together on the floor, turning, twisting, twirling, faster than the eyes could make out their hues; so that no one could discern lad from lass in the swift rush—only rainbow masses, flying about, driven as by a goal, with ever-changing tints, turning always with greater and more impetuous speed! At times the rush of air even blew out the candles: the music went on in the dark, and the dance as well, lit by the faint white beams of the moon shining in through the window. Then, athwart the seething dimness, were seen quick shadows, flying fast, chasing one another in the mingled darkness and silvery mist; foaming waves of pale glimmering and melodious din surged up out of the black night, in dusky harmonies of colour and sound—as in a vision or a dream—fading back into impenetrable murk, to loom once more distinct against the pallid wall, from which the glazed images of the saints reflected the moonbeams with crinkled flickers; and again they plunged and vanished into the shadows, and only the sounds of heavy breathing, and quick steps and cries, made their presence vaguely known in the entangled confusion of the unlit room!



One dance followed another in rapid succession, and with no interval between them. As each new dance was struck up, new dancers directly sprang forward, erect as a forest, swift of advance as a gale of wind; and loudly the stamping feet thundered afar, and shouts of merriment echoed through the house, while the onset went on, wild, mad, stormy, and earnest as a struggle for life and death!

Ah! how they danced!

Those Cracoviennes, with their frolicsome hop-skip-and-jump measures, and the quick lilt of their clean-cut, tinkling, metallic tunes; and the terse ditties, full of fun and freedom, with which, like the spangled girdles of the peasantry who made them, they are so brightly studded—those tunes welling with joyous dashing melody, redolent of the strong, abounding, audacious savour of youth in sportful pursuit of the sweet thrilling emotions that tell of the heyday in the blood!

And those Mazurs, long-drawn-out as the paths which streak the endless plains, wind-clamorous and vast as the endless plains they streak: lowly, yet heaven-kissing; melancholy and bold, magnificent and sombre, stately and fierce: genial, warlike, full of discordances, like that peasants' nature, set in battle array, united as a forest and rushing to dance with such joyful clamours and wonderful strength as could attack and overcome ten times their number, nay, conquer, sweep away, trample down, the whole of a hostile world, nor reckon though they themselves be doomed, and fall, but still carry on the dance after death, still stamping as in the Mazur—still crying out aloud: "Oy dana dana!"

And oh, those Obertases!—short of rhythm, vertiginous, wild and frantic, warlike and amorous, full of excitement mingled with dreamy languor and notes of sorrow; throbbing with hot blood, brimming over with geniality and kindness, in a sudden hailstorm: affectionate voices, dark-blue glances, springtime breezes, and fragrant wafts from blossoming orchards, like the song of fields in the young year; making tears and laughter to burst forth at the same

time, and the heart to utter its lay of joy, and the longing soul to go beyond the vast fields around her, beyond the far-off forests, and soar dreaming into the world of All Things, and sing ecstatically the burden, "Oy dana dana!"

And all these dances, beyond the power of words to describe, thus followed one after the other, that our peasantry might make merry in season!

And thus did they take their pleasures at the wedding of Boryna and Yagna.

The hours slipped away in clamour and din and uproar; in noisy merry-making and dances fast and furious: they did not note that the dawn was spreading in the East, that the daybreak's streams were slowly pouring their pallor into the night's black gloom. The stars grew wan, the moon sank; a wind that sprang up beyond the woods passed by, chasing the dark that waxed thinner and thinner: the gnarled tufted trees looked in at the windows, bowing yet lower their slumbrous frost-crowned heads, but the folk within were singing and dancing still!

The doors had been thrown wide open; so had the windows; the house, brimming and boiling over with lights and tumult, trembled, creaked and groaned, while the dance went on, now in utterly uncontrollable and rapturous excitement. It seemed to those within—such was their state!—that trees and people, earth and stars, and the hedges and the time-honoured cabin itself, were all wrestling and writhing together, united in one inextricably whirling cluster, blind, intoxicated, raving, and in utter oblivion of all; reeling and rolling from room to room, from wall to wall, from passage to passage, and out into the road and the enormous world, caught in a round that filled the universe—fading away in the long unbroken chain of crimson lights now glowing in the East!

And the music led them on—the tunes played and the songs.

How they kept time in their growling, the gruff bass-viols, uttering their broken humming sounds, like huge humble-bees! And how the flutes led the band, merrily whistling



and twittering, as in mockery of the drum's joyful thuds and strokes, swelled by the jingling of its bells that shook with laughter, and floated lightly like a Jew's beard in the wind! And then how the fiddles took the lead and came to the front, like girls leading the ballet, and sang out loud and shrill at first as though to try their voices—then played with wide, sorrowful, heart-rending sweeps of the bow—the lamentations of orphans driven from their homes—and then again, with an instantaneous change, fell into a lilting tune—short, trilling, sharp, like the tripping of a hundred dancers' heels, at which a hundred full-throated lads shouted themselves out of breath, and quivered all over, and set once more to turn and sing and dance mincingly, laughing and rejoicing, heat rising anew to the head and desire to the heart, lie strong vodka . . . when they fell again into the slow long notes of sorrow and weeping—as dew upon the plains!—uttering the notes of our own beloved tune, most near to the heart, instinct with mighty yearning tenderness, and making all dance deliriously to the strains of our Mazovian air!

. . . . .

The candles were growing dim, so near was the day; a dingy ashen twilight pervaded the room where they danced. But they still took their enjoyment as heartily as ever. If any found the liquor now flowing too scantily, he sent to the tavern for more vodka, sought out companions, and drank with them to his liking.

Some had withdrawn; some were tired and resting awhile; some, overtaken by drink, were sleeping off its fumes in the passage or by the door: others, still more intoxicated, were stretched under the hedges. All the rest danced on, danced ever.

At last, some of the more sober made up a group by the porch and, beating the floor in measure, sang thus:

O wedding-guests, come home!  
Already sings the lark;



The wood is deep and dark,  
And ye have far to roam:

Come home!

O wedding-guests, come home!  
There's danger in delay:  
Athwart our weary way  
The loud floods roll and foam:

Come home!

But no one cared to listen to them and their song!

## CHAPTER XII

**I**T was grey dawn when Vitek, tired out by the merry-making and driven home by Yagustynka, hastened to Boryna's hut.

A little watch-light was burning there, like a glow-worm. Vitek looked in at the window, and beheld the old *Dziad*, Roch, sitting at the table, where he was singing hymns.

The boy silently glided away to the stable, and was fumbling at the door-catch, when he jumped back with a cry of astonishment. A dog had leaped upon him, uttering a whine.

"What, Lapa, Lapa? 'tis you back again, poor wretch!" he cried, and sat down on the door-step, overcome with joy. —"Hungry and starving: is it not so?"

He had put by a bit of sausage, saved from the feast, which he now took out of his bosom to offer the dog. But it did not care for food just then: it barked, laid its head on the lad's breast, and whined for sheer delight.

"Did they starve you, poor thing? did they drive you away?" he whispered, opening the cow-byre door, and at once throwing himself on his straw bed. "But now I shall defend and take care of you." With these words he nestled deep in the straw; and the dog, lying down beside him, growled gently and licked his face.

They were both asleep in an instant.

From the stable close by, Kuba called to him in a voice weakened by illness. He called for a long time; but Vitek was sleeping like a dormouse.

After a time, however, Lapa recognized his voice, and fell to barking furiously and pulling the boy's coat.

"What's the matter?" Vitek asked sleepily.

"Water! The fever is pulling me to pieces. . . . Water!"

Vitek, peevish and drowsy though he was, brought him a pailful, and held it to his lips.

"I am so ill, I can hardly breathe! . . . What's growling round here?"

"Why, Lapa!"

"Lapa is it?" Kuba groped to touch the dog's head in the dark; and Lapa leaped about, frisked, and tried to get on to the bed.

"Vitek, give the horses their hay; they have been gnawing the empty mangers a long time; and I cannot move. . . . Are they still dancing?" he asked a little later, when the lad was filling the racks with hay.

"They are not like to have done till noon; and some are so drunk, they are lying by the roadside."

"Ah, they are enjoying themselves, the masters are!" And he sighed deeply.

"Was the miller there?"

"Aye, but he left rather early."

"Many people?"

"Beyond counting. Why, the cabin was overflowing with them."

"Plenty for all?"

"Like manor guests! They brought them meat in such huge dishes! And vodka and beer and mead were poured out in floods! Of sausages alone, there were piles enough to fill three troughs."

"When is the bride coming?"

"This afternoon."

"They are rejoicing and feasting still. My God! I thought I'd gnaw a bone at least, and eat my fill once in my life! . . . And here I am, lying, sighing, and hearing about other people's good cheer!"

Vitek returned to his bed.

"If I could but feast my eyes on those good things!"

He said no more, feeling weary, sad, and tormented by a sort of faint timid querulousness that gnawed at his heart now. At last, however, he spoke, patting the dog's head.



"Well, well! may they all be the better for it! Let *them* at least get some pleasure out of this life!"

The fever, increasing, began to confuse his thoughts; to drive it away, he applied himself to prayer, offering himself to the mercy of the Lord Jesus; but he could not remember what he was saying; he was dazed with sleep coming over him, and only a string of ejaculations that were prayers mingled with tears, trickled from his consciousness—the told beads of a crimson rosary!

Now and then he roused himself, but only to look around him blankly, recognizing nothing, and fall back into deathly and corpse-like unconsciousness.

Again he woke, now to groan so loud that the horses pulled at their bonds and snorted to hear him.

"O God! that I may but hold out till day!" he moaned in terror; and his eyes wandered through the window, staring out at the world and the approaching dawn, seeking the sun in that sky yet grey and lifeless and studded with paling stars.

But the day was a long distance away still.

In the stable, plunged in turbid mistiness, the horses' outlines were growing dimly visible; and the racks beneath the window slits showed like ribs in the pale glimmer.

Fall asleep again he could not: the pains were torturing him anew; they felt like sharp gnarled sticks thrust into his legs, piercing, boring, stabbing in and in; and the agony became so unbearable that he started up, screaming with all his might, till Vitek woke and came round.

"I am dying! . . . Oh, how it pains! . . . How the pain swells! how it crushes me! Vitek, run for Ambrose . . . O Lord! . . . Or else call Yagustynka. . . . Perhaps she can help. . . . I am not able—my last hour is here . . ." He burst out weeping terribly.

Vitek, all sleepy as he was, ran to the wedding feast.

The dancing was yet at its height; but Ambrose, being completely tipsy by now, had taken his station on the road opposite the cabin, where he kept reeling and singing between the road and the edge of the pond.

Vitek implored him to come, and tugged him by the sleeve, but to no purpose; the old man heard nothing, understood nothing around him, singing the same song over again with obstinate repetition.

Vitek then applied to Yagustynka, who was not ignorant of healing. But she was in the private room, sipping *krupnik*,<sup>1</sup> talking and chattering with her good friends so intently that she would listen to no one else. And as the boy was importunate, begging her with tears to come at once, she in the end drove him from the room. So he went back crying to the stable, having accomplished nothing.

When he returned, Kuba was asleep again; and he too, burrowing deep in the straw and covering his head with a clout, went off to sleep.

It was long after breakfast-time when he was waked by the noise of the hungry unmilked cows, and by the fierce scoldings of Yagustynka, who, having overslept herself just like the others, now made up in clamour against them for what she had neglected herself.

It was only after she had got the work somewhat in swing that she went to see Kuba.

He said in a feeble voice: "Pray help me and do something."

"Just you marry a young wench, and you'll be well in a trice," she began cheerily; but, seeing his livid swollen face, grew serious at once. "You need a priest more than a physician. . . . What on earth can I do for you? . . . So far as I can see, you are sick unto death, aye, even unto death!"

"Must I die?"

"All's in God's hand: but you'll not escape Cross-bones' clutches, I'm thinking."

"I'm to die, say you?"

"Tell me: shall I send for his Reverence?"

"For his Reverence?" Kuba cried, in amazement. "His Reverence to come here—to a stable—to me?"

<sup>1</sup> *Krupnik*—a drink made of vodka, hot water, honey and spices.  
—Translator's Note.



"What of that? Think you he's made of sugar, and would melt if he came near horse-dung? It's a priest's business to go wherever they call him to a sick man."

"O Lord! how could I dare?"

"You are a silly sheep!" She shrugged her shoulders and left him.

"The woman knows not what she says," he muttered, greatly scandalized.

And now he was quite alone, all the others seeming to have forgotten him.

From time to time, Vitek looked in to give the horses provender and water. He gave him water, too; but presently went back to the wedding. At Dominikova's they were preparing to bring the bride home.

Often Yuzka would rush in noisily, bring him a bit of cake, prattle of many things, fill the stable with racket, and run out in a hurry.

Yes, and she had something to run for. Hard by, they were amusing themselves fairly well: the band, the shouting, the singing were to be heard through the walls.

Kuba lay motionless. A strange feeling of desolation had come over him. He merely listened, and noted how well they enjoyed themselves, and talked to Lapa, his never absent companion. They two ate Yuzka's cake together. Then the sick man called to the horses and talked to them also. They neighed with pleasure, turning their heads round from their mangers: the filly even managed to slip her halter and come to his pallet, where she caressed him, putting her warm moist nose close to his face.

"Poor dear, you have lost flesh, you have!" He patted her tenderly, and kissed her dilated nostrils. "As soon as I am well, you will fill out, even if I have to give you nothing but oats!"

Then he lapsed once more into silence, and stared at the blackened knots in the timber walls, oozing with dark drops of resin—as it were, tears of congealed blood.

Dumb, and with feeble sunbeams, the day peeped in



through the chinks, and a flood of shimmering motes appeared at the open doorway.

Hour after hour dragged by at a snail's pace, like lame, blind, and dumb beggars, crawling painfully through toilsome beds of deep sand.

Only, now and again, a few chirruping sparrows, swooping down on the stable in a noisy band, would boldly make for the mangers.

"Ah, the clever little ones!" Kuba said. "And God gives those tiny birds understanding, to find out where they can get food.—Be still, you, Lapa! let the poor things feed and keep up their strength: winter will presently be with them too."

The pigs now began to squeal and poke their muddied noses in at the door.

"Drive them off, Lapa! The beggars, they never have enough!"

After these, a lot of fowls came cackling to the threshold, and one large red cock was so bold as to pass over it to the baskets of provender. The others followed, but had no time to eat their fill, when a flock of gagging geese drew near, hissing on the threshold, flashing their red bills, stretching and swaying to and fro their straight white necks.

"Out with them, Lapa—out with them! All those fowls—as bad as women for quarrelling!"

Suddenly there was an uproar—screaming, flapping, feathers flying as out of a torn bed. Lapa had entered well into the spirit of the chase, and came back breathless and its tongue lolling out, but uttering cries of delight.

"Be quiet now!"

From the house there came a torrent of angry words, a sound of running, and the dragging of furniture from one room to another.

"Ah, they are making ready for the bride's coming!"

Someone, though rarely, passed along the road: this time it was a lumbering creaking cart, and Kuba, listening, tried to guess whose it was.

"That's Klemba's wagon. One horse—ladder frame-work; going to the woods for litter, I dare say. Yes, the axle rubs against the nave, so it creaks."

Along the road there was a continual sound of footsteps, talk, and noises scarcely to be heard at all; but he caught them, and made them out on the spot.

"That's old Pietras, going to the tavern.—Here comes Valentova, scolding: someone's geese have gone on to her field, belike.—Oh, she's a vixen, not a woman! . . . This, I think, is Kozlova, shouting as she runs—yes, it is! . . . Here is Peter, son of Raphael . . . when he talks, his mouth always seems full.—This is the priest's mare, going for water. . . . Now she stops . . . cart-wheels blocked by stones.—One of these days she will break a leg."

And so he went on, guessing at every sound he heard, going about all the village with quick thoughts and lively mental vision, and entering so into the whole life and troubles and worries of the place, he scarce noted that the day was declining, the wall darker in hue, the doorway dimmer, and the stable quite obscure.

Ambrose arrived only when evening had set in. He was as yet only partly sober; he staggered a little, and spoke so quickly it was hard to follow him.

"Hurt your leg, eh?"

"Look and see what it is."

Silently he undid the bloodstained rags; they had dried and stuck so fast to the leg that Kuba could not help shrieking as he pulled them off.

"A girl in childbed would not cry as you do!" Ambrose muttered scornfully.

"But it hurts so! How you tear me! O God!"

And Kuba all but howled.

"Oho! you have caught it finely! Was it a dog that tore your leg like that?" Ambrose cried, wondering. The leg was horribly mangled, and swollen with matter to the size of a water-can.

"It was—but pray tell no one—the forest-keeper that shot me. . . ."

"Yes, I see.—And hit you from afar, eh? Well, well! your leg will never again be of any use. I feel the splinters of bone rattling about. . . . Ah, why did you not call me in at once?"

"I feared . . . lest they should know I had been after a hare. . . . But I was out of the forest, when the keeper shot at me."

"Once, in the tavern, he complained; someone was doing mischief, he said."

"The foul carrion! Is a hare, then, the property of anyone? . . . He laid a trap for me. . . . I was in the open field, and he let fly with both barrels.—Oh, the hell-hound!—But say nothing; they would take me to the lawcourt; the gun, too, is not mine, and they would seize it at once. . . . I thought it might heal by itself.—Oh, help me! It pains so! it is tearing me to bits!"

"Ah, you cunning trickster, you! with your sly games and your forbidden quests, sharing the forest hares with the Squire!—But, you see, this partnership will have cost you your leg!"

He examined it again, and looked sorely distressed.

"Too late, ever so much too late!"

Kuba was terrified. "Please do something for me," he moaned.

Ambrose, without replying, turned up his sleeves, whipped out a very keen clasp-knife, grasped the leg firmly, and set about extracting the shots and expressing the matter.

Kuba roared like a beast at the slaughter-house, till the other gagged his mouth with his sheepskin, and then he swooned with the agony of it. After dressing the wound, and applying some ointment and fresh bandages, Ambrose brought him to.

"You will have to go to the hospital," he said in a low voice.

Kuba was still dazed. "To the hospital?" he asked, not knowing what was said.

"They would cut off your leg, and you might get well."

"My leg?"



"Of course. It is good for nothing: black—decayed—rotten."

"Cut it off?" he asked, still unable to understand.

"Yes. At the knee. Fear nothing: mine was cut off almost at the thigh; and I am alive yet."

"Then I shall get well again, if the wounded limb is cut off?"

"Even as though one should take out the pain with the hand . . . but you must go to the hospital."

"There . . . there they cut and carve living men's bodies!—Cut it off, you: I'll pay whatsoever you will, but cut it off!—To the hospital I will not go: I prefer dying here!"

"Then here you will die. None but a doctor can cut it off for you. I am off to the Voyt's at once; he will send you to town in a cart to-morrow."

"No use: I will not go," he replied, stubbornly.

"Fool! do you think they will ask your leave?"

The old man went out, and Kuba said to himself: "When it is cut off, I shall be well."

After the dressing, his leg had ceased to pain. But it was numb as far up as the groin, and he felt a tingling all along his side: this he did not notice, plunged in thought as he was.

"I should recover.—Yes, I surely should. Ambrose has nothing left him of his leg: all he walks on is wooden. And he said: 'As though one should take the pain out with his hand. . . .'—But then, Boryna would turn me away. . . . Aye, a farm-hand with but one leg—such a one cannot plough, nor do aught else.—what would become of me? I should have to tend cattle . . . or beg my bread! Wander about, or sit at some church-door.—O Lord, merciful Lord!" And on a sudden his position flashed clearly upon him; and under the horror that now assailed him, he even sat up. And then he uttered a deep cry of impotent agony, his mind rolling in an abyss from which he saw no issue. "O Jesus, Jesus!" he repeated in a fever of excitement, quaking in every limb.

Long did he shriek and struggle thus in his anguish; but in the midst of those tears and that despair, a certain resolve was slowly shaping itself, and he brooded more and more deeply. Little by little, he grew calmer, more at peace, thinking so profoundly that he heard nothing around him, though surrounded by the din of instruments and songs and clamour; just as if he had been in a deep sleep!

It was then that the bride and the wedding guests arrived at Boryna's house.

They had led away a goodly cow, and sent Yagna's box and feather-bed, and various articles that she had received as wedding presents, before her in a cart.

And now, just a little after sundown, the procession left Dominikova's cabin, as darkness was falling and the mists rising up.

Playing lustily, the band marched in front; then Yagna went on, still in her wedding dress, and conducted by her mother and friends: last of all, and without any order, came the ruck of guests, each in the place he had chosen.

Their way wound along by the pond, now darkened, its gleaming quenched in the ever-thickening folds of the fog; the silence and obscurity growing blacker and more dead, the tramping and music sounding muffled and, as it were, from underneath the water.

From time to time one of the younger folk broke out into song, or a matron took up a stave, or one of the peasant lads cried: "Da dana!" but it was only a short outburst.

They were as yet in no merry mood, and, besides, they were chilled to the marrow by the bleak damp air.

Only when they turned in to Boryna's enclosure did the bridesmaids lift their voices in a sad farewell:

Wending her way to her wedding,  
The maiden wept.  
Then lit they tapers four,  
And played upon the organ.—  
Didst fancy, maiden,  
That they would play for ever?  
—A little yesterday, to-day a little,



And after, thou shalt weep for all thy life!  
Da dana! . . . All thy life!

Before the threshold, and under the porch, Boryna was waiting along with Yuzka and the young men.

Dominikova came forward first of all, carrying in a bundle a piece of bread, a pinch of salt, a little charcoal, some wax from a Candlemas taper, and a handful of ears of corn, blessed on Assumption Day. As Yagna passed the threshold, the matrons cast behind her threads plucked from cloth seams, and the peels of hempstalks, that the Evil One might find no entrance, but all things thrive with her!

They greeted, kissed, and pledged one another in cups of mead, with wishes of luck, health, and all good gifts and blessings; then they entered and filled the whole room, every bench and nook and corner.

The players tuned their instruments, and then strummed softly, so as not to interfere with the feast that Boryna was now giving.

He simply went from matron to matron with a full goblet in hand, offering, pressing them to partake, gathering them in his arms, and drinking to each of them; the blacksmith took his place with the others.

Yuzka was bearing on platters pieces of a cake she had baked with curds and honey on purpose to please her father.

All the same, the party was dull. True, they emptied their glasses as in duty bound, nor did they turn away from the sausages. Nay, they even drank plentifully and with due zest; only there was no mirth amongst them.

The women too, who as a class are inclined to diversions and pastimes, now only sat still on the benches, or here and there in corners, not even talking much amongst themselves.

Yagna went into the private room, where she undressed. Returning in her everyday costume, she would have done the honours of the cabin and treated her guests herself, but that her mother would not let her touch anything.

"Darling, enjoy your wedding-day now! You'll yet have work enough and enough toil!" And again and again did



she weep over her most tenderly, and clasp her to her bosom.

The company found matter for laughter in this maternal sentimentality of hers: their jeers being all the sharper that now, on Yagna's arrival as mistress in her husband's home, owner of so much land and property of every sort, her new position was brought home to them. Many a mother, with yet unmarried daughters, felt very bitter against her; many a girl was choked with bile at the thought.

They went over to survey the other apartments, where Antek had formerly lived with his family. There Eva and Yagustynka had prepared a grand supper and made a roaring fire. Vitek had hardly been able to bring logs enough and place them under the enormous pots.

They examined all the premises besides, and ran their envious eyes over all that there was to be seen.

The house itself, to begin with, was the first in the whole village: large, conspicuous, tall, with rooms (they fancied) as good as those in a manor-house: whitewashed, and with boarded floors! Then how numerous the household articles and utensils were! In the big room, too, there were a score of holy images: and all of them glazed! And then, the byre, the stable, the granary, the shed! Five cows were kept there, to say nothing of the bull—no small source of profit. And the horses, and the geese, and the swine—and, above all, the land!

Eaten up with envy, they sighed deeply; and one said to another:

"Lord! and to think that all this goes to one that is undeserving!"

"Oh! they knew well how to bring their pigs to market!"

"Yes; he that goes to meet luck always finds it."

"Why should your Ulesia have missed this chance?"

"Because she fears God and leads an honest life."

"And all the rest do the same!"

"Oh, were she other than she is, folk would not stand it of her. Let them but meet her once at night in company with a lad, and all the world will know!"

"What luck this one has!"

"'Tis the fruit of shamelessness."

"Come along!" Andrew called out, interrupting their talk. "The music is playing, and not one petticoat is in the room—nobody to dance with!"

"A mind to dance you have, but will your mother let you?"

"So eager?—Beware and let not your trousers fall, boy: 'twere no fair sight!"

"Nor trip the dancers up with your legs!"

"Pair off with Valentova; you'll make a fine couple . . . of scarecrows!"

Andrew rapped out an oath, took hold of the first girl he came across, and led her off, paying no heed to the wasps humming behind him.

There were but few couples in the room as yet, and these danced but slowly and (it seemed) with little zeal. Nastka and Simon Paches were the only exception, and frisked about very willingly. They had arranged matters beforehand and, with the opening sounds of the music, had joined in close union, and bounced about in scrupulous fulfilment of their promise.

But no sooner had the Voyt come in (he was late, having had to go with the recruits to the District Barracks) than he began to make things look more lively; drinking deep, talking with all the farmers present, and cracking jokes with the newly-wedded couple.

"Why, your bride is as red as her skirt, and you are as white as a sheet!"

"You'll not say that to-morrow."

"Matthias, experienced as you are, you surely have not wasted a day."

"Nay, with all eyes upon him? Fie! the man is no gander."

"I would not bet half a quart that you say true. You know: throw but a pebble into the bush: out flies the bird! 'Tis the Voyt tells you so!"

Yagna made her escape from the room; which occasioned a loud guffaw.

The women then proceeded to wag their tongues very much at their ease, careless of what they said.

The hubbub swelled, and the guests grew more good-humoured in proportion. Boryna, bottle in hand, went several times the round of the company; the dancers, now more numerous, frisked with livelier steps, and began to stamp and sing, and circle about the room in wider rounds.

Then did Ambrose make his appearance and, sitting down (nearly at the threshold), follow the bottle with wistful eyes, as it went its way.

The Voyt cried to him: "You never turn your head, except towards the clinking of glasses."

"Because of that same clinking!" he answered. "And he has merit who gives to drink to them that thirst."

"You leather bottle! here's water for you!"

"What's good for cattle may be bad for man. They say: 'Water to drink is now and then not bad, but harm from vodka no one ever had!'"

"Here's vodka for you, since you discourse so well."

"You first, Voyt!—They say, too: 'Water for a christening, vodka for a wedding, and tears for a death!'"

"Well said: drink another."

"I should not even shirk a third. For my first wife I always take one, but two for my second!"

"Why so?"

"Because she died in time for me to seek a third."

"What! Still dreaming about women, and his old eyes see no more as soon as twilight comes!"

"It is not always necessary to see."

At this, they laughed uproariously, and the women cried out:

"For the love of vodka and of talk, they are both well matched."

"There's a saying: 'A wife good in talk, and a man strong in deed, have every chance in the world to succeed.'"

The Voyt had now sat down by Ambrose, the others crowding round, as many as could find seats, or, if they



could not, standing about with little heed to the dancers' convenience.

And then began such a running fire of witty sayings, jests, comic tales, and joyous banter, that they all shook with laughter. In this field, Ambrose was the recognized leader, and chaffed his hearers to their very faces with so much humour and fun that they were like to split their sides. Amongst the women, Vachnikova yielded to none for drollery; she played first fiddle in that respect, with the Voyt for bass-viol, so far as his official dignity permitted.

The musicians sawed away as hard as they could, and scraped out the liveliest tunes they had; and the dancers were shuffling along as fast, and shouting, and screaming, and tapping with nimble heels. Blithe and delighted, they had forgotten the rest of the world, when one of them chanced to notice Yankel standing outside in the passage. At once they pulled him into the room. The Jew took off his cap, with amicable bows and salutations to all present, and taking no notice of the nicknames showered upon him.

"Yellow one!—Unchristened one!—Son of a mare!"

"You be quiet there!" cried the Voyt. "Let us treat him! Here, a glass of the best vodka!"

"I was passing along the road, and wanted to see how you husbandmen divert yourselves.—God reward you, Mr. Voyt.—I'll take a drop of vodka—why should I not?—to the health of the newly-wedded pair!"

Boryna raised the bottle and invited Yankel, who, after wiping the glass with the skirt of his capote, covered his head, and tossed off one glass, followed by a second.

"Stay a bit, Yankel: it will not make you unclean," they cried out in a merry vein. "Here, musicians, play us the Jewish dance, and Yankel will caper to it."

"Yes, I may dance; why not? 'Tis no sin."

But ere the players had understood what was wanted of them, Yankel slipped quietly into the passage, and vanished in the yard. He had come to get back his gun.

They scarce noticed his exit. Ambrose had all the time

gone on with his entertainment, to which Vachnikova contributed a violoncello accompaniment, so to speak. And he continued until supper-time, when the music ceased, the tables were pushed forward, and the clatter of dishes was heard: yet they still listened and he still held forth.

Boryna invited them to sup, but without effect. Yagna asked them again and again. The Voyt only got her into the circle, made her sit down by him, and held her by the hand.

It was Yasyek (nicknamed Topsy-turvy) who bellowed out: "Come, good folk, and set to: the dishes are cooling."

"Hold your tongue, blockhead, or lick the dishes with it."

"Old Ambrose! You are lying like a gipsy, and fancy we don't know it!"

"Yasyek, take what folk put into your mouth: you're good at that. But leave me alone, you are no match for me!"

"No match! Just you try, then!" the foolish lad shouted. He thought Ambrose meant fighting.

"An ox could do all you can . . . or more!"

"Because you bear his Reverence's night-vase, Ambrose, you think none has wit but you."

Ambrose was offended, and growled: "Let a calf into church, he'll come out just as he was.—Idiot!"

Yasyek's mother attempted to stand up for her son. He went off to table first of all, and soon the others took their places in a hurry; for the cooks had brought in the smoking dishes, and the odour filled the room.

They seated themselves in order of precedence, as was fitting for the bride's installation ceremony: Dominikova and her sons in the middle, bridesmen and bridesmaids together; Boryna and Yagna remained standing to serve the guests, and see that all was done properly.

A quiet interval succeeded, save that the brats outside made a noise at the window, fighting with one another, and Lapa barked in great excitement about the house and passages. The company were quiet and decorous, while they



worked hard to put the eatables away: only their spoons tinkled about the rims of the dishes, and the glasses jingled going round.

Yagna was continually busy, setting some particular dainty before each guest: here it was meat, there some other very good thing. And she begged them all so courteously not to stint themselves, and behaved with such natural grace, conquering all hearts with her beauty and the pleasant words she said, that many of the men present could not but gaze on her in adoration, and her mother even laid down her spoon to look and rejoice in her daughter.

Boryna, too, noticed this, and when she happened to go to the kitchen, followed, caught up with her in the passage, gave her a mighty hug, and kissed her enthusiastically.

"Dear, what a housewife you make!—Like a manor-house lady—so dignified and so pleasing in everything!"

"Am I not, eh?—Now run away to the room: Gulbas and Simon are sitting apart, grumpy and eating little. Get them to drink with you!"

He obeyed, and did all she wanted. And Yagna felt now strangely blithe of heart, and full of affection. She knew herself the mistress of the house, knew that power had somehow got into her hands: and therewith she was aware of an accession of authority and serenity and strength. She walked about the place at ease, eyed all she saw with keen understanding, and managed things as though she had been married ever so long.

"What she is, the old man will find out soon enough, and that's his business; but to my mind there are in her the makings of a housewife—and a fine one, too!" was Eva's muttered remark to Yagustynka.

"A fool that's in favour will always be clever," the latter returned bitterly. "Things will go on as they are till she has had too much of the old man, and begins again running after young fellows."

"Aye, Matthew is lying in wait: he has not given her up."

"But give her up he will! Somebody else will make him!"



"Boryna?"

"Boryna?" She smiled a crafty smile. "No, someone yet mightier. I mean—no: time will show, and you will see.—Vitek! Drive that dog away: it barks and barks till my ears are aching. And drive those boys away too: they will be breaking the panes, or doing some mischief."

Vitek rushed out with a stick. The dog barked no more. But there were cries without, and the noisy footfalls of a crowd of flying urchins. He drove them into the road, and ran back, bent double to escape a shower of missiles that assailed him.

Roch showed himself in the shade at the corner of the yard. "Vitek, wait a little. Call thou Ambrose; say I want him very urgently indeed, and am awaiting him in the porch."

It was only after some time that Ambrose appeared, and in a detestable humour. His supper had been interrupted, and at the very best dish of all—sucking-pig with peas.

"What? what? Is the church on fire?"

"Do not raise your voice so. Come to Kuba: I fear he is dying."

"Oh, let him die, then, and not prevent folk from eating their supper! I was with him only this very evening, and told him he would have to go to the hospital, and get his leg cut off, and he would be well in a trice."

"You told him that?—Oh, then I understand. . . . I—I think he has cut off his own leg!"

"Jesu Maria!—His—his own leg?"

"Come instantly and look. I was going to sleep in the cow-byre, and had just entered the yard, when Lapa came barking to me, and jumping, and pulling me by my capote. I could not make out what it wanted; but it ran forward, sat down on the stable threshold, and howled. Thither I went and saw Kuba lying in the doorway, half in, half out. I thought at first he had gone to get some air, and fainted on the way: so I carried him back to his pallet, and lit the lantern to get him some water; and it was then I saw he

was bloodstained all over—deathly pale, and with blood pouring from his leg.”

They went in, and Ambrose did his very best to bring Kuba to; but the poor fellow was extremely weak. He scarce drew breath, and a rattling sound came through his teeth, clenched so fast that, to give him a little water, they had to prize them open with a knife.

The leg, which had been hewn off at the knee, and still dangled by a shred of skin, bled profusely.

A great pool of gore lay on the threshold, close to a blood-stained ax and the grindstone, usually placed under the eaves, now fallen near the doorway.

“Aye, he has cut it off himself. Afraid of the hospital.—A fool to think it would avail him: but dauntless and resolute all the same.—Good God! . . . his own leg! . . . it is simply incredible. . . . And the blood he has lost!”

At this juncture, Kuba opened his eyes, and looked round him with returning consciousness.

“Is it off? . . . I struck twice, but swooned——” he said feebly.

“Any pain?”

“None at all. . . . Weak as water . . . but not ailing.”

Ambrose dressed, washed and bound the leg with moist rags, Kuba lay still meanwhile, uttering not the least sound.

Roch, on his knees, held the lantern, praying fervently the while; but the patient smiled—a faint tearful smile, as when an orphan babe, abandoned afield, knows only that his mother is not there, not that she has forsaken him, and enjoys the grass waving over his head, and the sunbeams, and stretches out his hands to the birds that fly past, conversing with all around him after his fashion: even so did he feel now. He was at ease, without pain and in comfort; so cheerful that he thought no whit of his ill, but felt secretly rather proud of himself. How sharp he had ground the ax! how well he had placed the limb on the threshold, and—one blow not sufficing—struck a second with all his might! And now the pain was all gone; so of course he

had succeeded.—Oh, if he were but a trifle stronger, he would not lie rotting on that pallet any more, but be up, and go to the wedding . . . dance even—and eat a morsel, for he would fain eat!

“Lie you still, and do not budge. I will tell Yuzka, and you shall have something to eat presently.” So said Roch, patting his cheeks; and he went out into the yard with Ambrose.

“He will drop off ere morning—fall asleep like a little bird: there’s no more blood in him.”

“Then, while he is conscious, the priest must be sent for.”

“His Reverence has gone to spend the evening at the manor-house at Vola.”

“I’ll go and tell him: there must be no delay.”

“Five miles on foot and through the forest! You would never be in time.—No: the carts of those guests here who leave after supper are ready; take one and go.”

They got a cart on to the road, and Roch seated himself.

“Do not forget Kuba!” he called out as he started: “Have a care of him!”

“Yes, yes, I shall remember, and not leave him by himself.”

Nevertheless, he did forget him almost directly. After telling Yuzka about the eatables, he went back to supper, and applied himself so close to the bottle that he very soon remembered nothing at all. . . .

Yuzka, being a kind-hearted little girl, at once brought him all she could get, piling it up on a dish, with half a quart of vodka.

“Here, Kuba, is something for you, that ye may eat and enjoy yourself.”

“God bless you!—Sausage it is, I fancy;—a delightful smell!”

“I fried it for you, that you might find it more savoury.” She put the dish into his hands, for the stable was dark. “But drink of the vodka first.”

He drained the glass to the last drop.



"Will you sit with me a little? I feel lonely here."

He broke the food, bit and chewed it—but could swallow nothing.

"Are they in good spirits over there?"

"Oh, yes! and so many people! I never saw more company in all my life."

"Of course, of course," he said, proudly; "is it not Boryna's wedding?"

"Yes; and Father is so pleased . . . and always going after Yagna!"

"Indeed, for she is so beautiful—as fair to see as a Manor-house lady any day."

"Do you know, Simon, Dominikova's son, is taken with Nastka!"

"His mother will forbid him. There are only three acres of land at Nastka's, and ten mouths to feed."

"That's why she keeps strict watch and drives them apart when she finds them together."

"Is the Voyt here?"

"He is.—Talking a great deal, and—together with Ambrose—making the company laugh."

"And why not, being at so great a wedding, and with so great a man?—Do you know anything of Antek's doings?"

"Ah, I ran over to him at dusk, with cake and meat and bread for the little ones. But he turned me out, and threw the things after me. He is very resolute; and fierce. Oh, so fierce! And there is wailing and misery in their hovel. Hanka is always quarrelling with her sister, and they have well-nigh come to blows."

He made no reply, but breathed somewhat harder.

"Yuzka," he said after a while, "the mare!—I hear her moaning. Since evening she has been lying down: she must be near foaling-time, and ought to be looked after. Prepare a mash for her.—Hark how she moans! And I cannot help at all, so weak I feel—quite helpless!"

He was worn out, and said no more for a while, seeming to be asleep.

Yuzka rose and went out in a hurry.

"Ces, Ces, Ces!" he called to the mare, as he woke suddenly.

The mare uttered a low whinny, and tugged at her halter till the chain clanked again.

"So then, once in my life at least, I shall eat and be filled! Aye, and you too, good dog, shall get your share: no need to whine."

He attempted once more to swallow some sausage, but quite in vain: it stuck in his throat.

"Lord, Lord, such heaps of food . . . and I cannot so much as eat one mouthful!"

Yes, it was utterly useless: he could not. His hand fell powerless, and, still grasping the meat, he put it underneath the straw of his bed.

"So much! Never so much yet! And all for nothing!"—He felt rather sore.

"But let me rest a little now; and later, when I can eat, the feast shall begin."

He was just as unable afterwards, and slipped off into a coma, still holding the sausage, and unaware that Lapa was stealthily gnawing at it.

Suddenly his senses returned.—The supper was over, and such a blast of music burst on his ears from over the yard, that the stable-walls vibrated, and the frightened fowls fell a-cackling on their roosts.

The dance was in full and boisterous swing—and the laughter and the frolic and the fun. Again and again the trampling of feet resounded, and the shrill cries of the lasses pierced the night.

At first, Kuba gave ear; but presently he became oblivious of all things. A drowsiness seized upon him, and carried him off into, as it were, a clangorous darkness, as though beneath swift swirling murmurous waters. But when the dance grew noisier, and the tumult and hubbub of the stamping heels seemed about to beat all to shivers, he stirred slightly: his soul peered up out of the dungeon where it lay; roused from oblivion, coming back from infinite distances, it listened.



At such times, Kuba would endeavour to eat a little, or whispered low, but from the heart:

"Ceska, Ces, Ces!"

And now at last his soul was slowly withdrawing—winging its way through the universal frame of things. A new-fledged bird divine, it fluttered around uncertainly at first, unable to soar, and at times with a revival of attachment to that sacred earth, its body, where it fain would rest from the weariness of flight, and craved to soothe the pangs of bereavement in the haunts of men. Back it went on earth amongst his own, its loved ones, calling sorrowfully to its brethren, and imploring their aid: but after a time, strengthened by the Divine power and mercy, it was enabled to soar on high, even unto those mysterious fields of endless spring, those infinite unbounded fallows which God has made beautiful with everlasting sunbeams and eternal joy.

And higher yet it flew, and higher, yet higher, higher—yea, till it set its feet——

Where man can hear no longer the voice of lamentation, nor the mournful discords of all things that breathe——

Where only fragrant lilies exhale balmy odours, where fields of flowers in bloom waft honey-sweet scents athwart the air; where starry rivers roll over beds of a million hues; where night comes never at all——

Where silent prayers go up for ever, like smoke of incense, in odoriferous clouds; and the bells tinkle, and the organ plays softly; and the ransomed people—Angels and Saints together—sing the Lord's praises in the Holy Church, the divine and lasting City!

Yes, worn out and longing to be at rest, thither did the soul of Kuba fly away!

. . . . .

But in the house they all were dancing—enjoying themselves with the heartiest mirth and the best goodwill. Better still than the evening before, the good cheer being dealt out more generously, and the hosts more pressing. And so they danced till they could dance no more.



The place was in commotion, like a cauldron set upon a great fire. Did the enjoyment show any signs of flagging, at once the band set to with renewed zeal; and the guests, like a field stirred by the wind and waving, sprang up and began to dance anew with fresh fire and song and din and tumult.

Now were their souls quite melted within them by the volcanic enthusiasm of their host; their blood seethed hot, reason was almost giving way, their hearts were beating with the wildest frenzy. For them, every movement now seemed a dance, every cry a song, and every look a glance of ecstasy!

And so it went on all night long, and even till morning. But the day rose, dull and still: the rays of dawn appeared together with dense dreary masses of clouds. Ere the sun had risen, the world grew very dark and dismal. And then the snow came down: at first whirling, fluttering, scanty—as when the needles fall from pine-trees on a windy day; until it set to falling in earnest.

Then, as though coming through a sieve, the snow descended in perpendicular flakes, straight down, equally dealt out, monotonous, noiseless, covering roofs, trees, and hedges, and all the land, as with an enormous covering of white feathers.

The wedding was really at an end at last. True, they were to meet again at the tavern in the evening, “to wind up”; but for the present they decided to return home.

Only the bridesmen and bridesmaids, with the band to lead them, drew up in the porch and sang in unison a short song, in which, declaring themselves the devoted servants of the wedded couple, they wished them good night—in the morning!

It was then that Kuba laid his soul at the sacred feet of the Lord Jesus. . . .

END OF PART I



PART II  
WINTER  
CHAPTER I

WINTER had come.

In the first days, it was but trying its strength—wrestling with the autumn, and howling far away in the livid distance, like some ravenous monster.

Now dawned those chilly glacial days, days of dismal and mournful dejection, lit with a dribbling feeble light; corpse-like days, when the birds flew away to the woods with cries of dread, and the waters babbled fearsomely, rolling sluggishly on, as if palsied by the terror of the cold; and the very country-side seemed to shudder, and all that was therein to look in awe towards the north and its unfathomable depths of clouds.

As yet the nights were as those in autumn, full of dreary sighs and soughs; sounds as of struggling, and sudden hushes; the howl of dogs; the cracking snaps of freezing timber; the sad voices of shelter-seeking birds; horrible calls from weird woodlands and crossways, invisible in the dark; and the beating of eerie wings, and shadows lurking beneath the walls of the stupefied cottagers.

At evening, from time to time, the huge crimson bulk of the setting sun would still peer out of the west, going down ponderously—a globe of molten iron, whence blood-red floods would gush forth, with smoke-like pitch-black vapours rising round them, looking like a grand and gloomy conflagration.

They said: "The winter is growing harder, and ill winds will be rising soon."

And indeed the winter did grow harder—every day, every hour, every minute.

Directly after the fourth of December (the day of St.



Barbara, patroness of a holy death), the first of the winter gales began blowing in short whiffing puffs. They skimmed along the ground, with a baying like that of hounds hot on a trail. They bit into the ploughed fields, snarled about the bushes, worried the snow-drifts, tore at the orchard boughs, swept along the highways, sniffed in the streams; and here and there, with but little ado, they ruined every thatch and fence that was in poor condition. After which they fled, still baying, away to the forest lands; and after them out of the dusk came the great winds on the very same evening, their long sharp tongues lolling out of their wheezy jaws.

All night they blew, howling across the fields like packs of famished wolves. They did their work well, too. Ere morning the stark hardened earth had been quite stripped of its tattered and scattered covering of snow; only in places, in hollows and ditches, could a few white rags be seen on the fences. The fields too had some shiny white spots left; but the roads lay frozen deep—as it were, petrified—and the frost had bitten profoundly into the soil with its keen fangs, so that it resounded with a metallic ring like iron. But with the morning, the gales fled to hide in the woods, where they lurked, tremulous and shuddering.

The sky, too, was now overcast, ever with darker clouds, which came creeping up out of every cavern, raising heads of monstrous size, stretching forth long lean flanks, throwing their grey manes to the winds, baring gigantic discoloured teeth, and coming on in mighty battalions.—From the north: black, huge, all shredded and tattered, piled in tiers, branching out like a score of overthrown forests, one upon the other, separated by deep chasms, and with—so it seemed—great streaks scattered over them of greenish ice, as it were: these rushed forward with wild might and a dull murmuring sound. From the west: those advanced slowly—livid, enormously swollen bulks, which in places shone bright as fire; and they rolled one after another, more and more persistent in their long advance, not unlike flocks of great birds. From the east came sailing flattened,



rusty-hued masses of vapour, monotonously the same, and forbidding to the eye as mouldering carcasses that drip with tainted gore. From the south, too, were wafted ancient-looking clouds, reddish dark in hue, recalling clods of peat, striped and motley to see, though dingy and dull, as if vermin burrowed within them. There were also clouds floating on high, seeming to descend from the pale quenched orb of the sun, and forming dingy wisps, or spreading out in manifold tints, as embers that are dying. And they all came forward, built up mountains of prodigious height, and concealed all the sky under a black seething flood of squalor and grime.

The whole land had suddenly turned to darkness; a dull silence prevailed on every side; all the lights had grown dim; the bright eyes of the waters were glazing over; all beings felt petrified and stood in amazement with bated breath. Up out of the earth surged the fear of what was to come; the frost penetrated even to the marrow of the bones, and every living thing trembled with the terror of it. They saw the hare running through the village, with shaggy fur standing fluffy on end; they saw the ravens alighting with hoarse croaks upon the granaries, and even entering the houses. Dogs howled wildly outside in the yard; men sped in fear to take shelter in their huts: while along the pond the priest's blind mare went to and fro with the ruins of the cart, and struck against the fences, and with a weird cry sought her way back to the stable.

The darkness began to be continual, murky and exceedingly depressing; daily the clouds sailed lower; they came creeping down from the forests, like thick volumes of dust, and rolled along the fields like floods of turbid water: then, coming to the village, plunged all things in a dingy ice-cold fog. And suddenly there would come a rent through the midst of the sky that shone dark-blue like the azure mirror of a well: a wild wind whistled through the dim space, the fogs at once were driven together on either side, and by the shattered gateway thus made came a first loud blast, soon followed by another, a score, and hundreds.

They howled on in troops, they poured forwards in torrents that nothing could restrain; they rushed along as if coming out of broken fetters, in raging bellowing multitudes, striking at the gloom, dispelling it utterly, swallowing it up or sweeping it away like rotten chaff.

And out and far over the fields, in screaming turmoil, was driven the fog as froth before the wind.

The clouds, trampled down by the feet of the pitiless storm, fled and rolled off, to skulk in the woodlands and forests. The sky was swept clean; once more, though with dull and sullen mien, the day peered forth, and every creature drew a breath of relief.

For nearly the whole of Sunday the gales blew on without any surcease or abatement. In the day-time, they were not yet quite intolerable; but the nights became beyond bearing. These fell, bright and starlit, and it was then that the gales played their most furious pranks. Folks did not say (as they do when the wind is high): "Sure someone has hung himself," but: "Fivescore men must be hanging now!" What with the howling, the banging, and the creaking as of a thousand empty wagons dashing at a gallop over hard-frozen ice, no one could sleep a wink.

The huts creaked likewise. Often and again did the storm come driving at the corners, heaving up the thatches, butting at the doors: sometimes even breaking in the panes so that they had to get up at night and stop them with pillows: for it then rushed in with a sound like the squealing of noisy swine—bringing along with it such fierce cold as benumbed the inmates under their eiderdown quilts.

None can say what the villagers suffered, in the course of those days, of those nights.

Nor what harm was done abroad. The blasts bore down the fences, plucked off the thatched roofs, and—at the Voyt's—blew down a shed that was all but new. They tore the roof from Bartek Koziol's granary, and carried it away more than a furlong's distance into the fields; they threw down the chimney at the Vincioreks'; they wrenched a good bit of boarding from the mill-roof: and as to the multi-



tudes of minor losses, and the many trees uprooted in the orchards and woods, who can tell them? Why, upon the highway alone, they tore up and cast across the road about a score of poplars, that lay like as many murdered and pitilessly mutilated corpses!

The oldest inhabitant could not remember when the winds had been so hostile and done so much injury.

Folk therefore kept at home, wrangling together beneath the smoky rafters of their own cabins; for it was no light matter to show one's nose round the corner. Some of the women, however, being less patient, would at times cautiously step outside their enclosures and visit their gossip-loving neighbours: ostensibly to spin in company, but in reality to whet their tongues and give vent to their ill humour. Meanwhile, the men were threshing stubbornly on behind the closed granary-doors, and from morning till late at night the flails smote upon the floor. The frost had nipped the corn; and so the grain was more readily threshed out.

These gales brought with them more and more biting frosts. With mighty strokes they had frozen all the brooks and streamlets. The morasses were now solid. Even the mill-pond was coated over with a sheet of bluish transparent ice. Only close to the bridge, where the water grew deeper, was it still in motion: all the rest of its banks were fettered by the ice, and openings had to be cut for drawing water.

No change of weather came till St. Lucia's day.

Then the frost slackened somewhat; the winds paused to take breath: they swept the plain more seldom and with less boisterous fury; the grey sky grew smooth as a well-harrowed field's vast hempen-coloured surface, and so low that it seemed resting on the poplar tree-tops along the road.

But presently, after the noonday Angelus, the frost increased a little and the snow fell in large flakes.

Dusk then came earlier, and the snow still fell thicker and thicker, though drier and more powdery, until the night closed in.



By morning the snow was three good spans deep; it covered the whole land like a fleece, veiled it under its own white expanse, shaded with bluish tints; and still it continued to fall without intermission.

And so great a stillness came over the land that no noise, no sound pierced the masses of down, now floating to the ground. All had grown silent, dumb: as though, by some miracle, all things had stopped in awe, listening to the all but inaudible rustle of the falling flakes, so quietly floating earthward—a dim flickering whiteness, unceasingly descending!

The night was now a whitish obscurity, a glimmering, pearly, immaculate dawn, like the finest bleached wool on earth; this glimmering from out of the infinite abyss—as it were, the frozen shimmer of the light of all stars, condensed and ground to dust in its downward flight from heaven—now besprinkled the whole country; and soon the pine-woods were shrouded, the meadows disappeared, the highways vanished, and all the village was lost in the silvery haze and blinding dust, and nothing more was to be seen but streams of sifted snow, wafted down as still and smooth and soft as cherry-blossoms in a moonlit night!

At three paces' distance, there was no making out either huts or trees or fences, or any human face; human voices alone, like butterflies on wearied wings, flitted about in the nebulous whiteness.

This went on for two whole days and nights. In the end, the cabins were all snowed up, and rose, each like a snow-covered hill, with a long tress of smoke waving from its top. Roads and fields had become one vast plain: the orchards were all filled with snow, even above the tops of the enclosures; the pond had become quite invisible beneath the avalanche and, in place of the ground, there was but a pale, flat, impassable, miraculous plain of down.

The snow fell still, though now more dry and scantier. At night the stars would twinkle athwart its curtain: by day, at times, the blue sky would show beyond the whirl of floating specks and flitters; voices sounded more sonorous

and came no longer muffled through the veil. The village seemed to wake up a little, and folk began to stir themselves. Some even attempted to drive out in sledges, but soon returned, finding the ways impracticable. Here and there, they dug paths through the snow from cabin to cabin; every heart rejoiced. Especially the children were beside themselves with delight; and dogs rushed about everywhere, barking, licking the snow, and scampering with the urchins, who swarmed on to the roadways, clamoured in the enclosures, shouted, pelted one another with snowballs, built horrible monsters, and dragged each other about on toboggans; their joyful cries and merry sports filled all the place with din. Roch had to give up teaching that day, for keeping them in the house over their primers was impossible.

About the third day, the snow ceased as twilight fell; and though there were still a few flakes, they were like the shakings out of an empty sack of flour—nothing to speak of. But the sky was overcast, crows flapped their wings about the houses and alighted on the roads; the night came down starless and leaden, its obscurity diminished only by the whiteness of the frosty snow—and as still as one shorn of strength to the uttermost.

"Let but the slightest wind spring up, and we shall have a snow-storm," muttered old Bylitsa the next morning, as he peeped out at the window.

Hanka lit the fire on the hearth, and looked into the passage. It was early yet: all over the hamlet, the cocks were crowing. The twilight was still dusky, as if lime and soot had been mingled and spread over the world; but in the east there glowed a heap, as it were, of ash-covered embers.

The cold in the room was so keen, so damp and bitterly piercing, that Hanka had to put on her clogs in the house over her bare feet. On the hearth, there was scarce any fire at all; the green juniper brushwood only crackled and smoked. Hanka hacked a few chips off a board, poked some straw under them, and at last got the fire to blaze.

"Enough snow has fallen for a whole winter," the old



man said again, blowing on the window, crusted over with a thick coating of greenish ice.

The eldest boy, now entering on his fourth year, began crying in bed; and from Staho's lodgings on the other side of the hut, angry voices, the weeping of children, and the slamming of doors were heard.

"Oh, Veronka is already at her morning prayers!" Antek remarked satirically, as he wound round his legs the bands he had previously warmed at the fire.

"Ah, well," the old man mumbled, "she has learned to talk—and she talks. A little too much perhaps, but she means no harm."

"Means no harm! And does she mean no harm when she beats her children? Does she mean no harm when she leads poor Staho a dog's life, with never a good word for him?" Thus Hanka made reply, as she knelt down by the cradle to suckle her little baby, which was crying and kicking its legs about.

"Since we came, three Sundays have gone by: not one day has passed without a quarrel and fighting and curses. She a woman? No, she's a brute. . . . But Staho too is a mollycoddle, who lets her swinge and cuff him at will. He works like a horse, and she treats him worse than a dog."

The old man cast a deprecating look at Hanka, and was about to say a word in Veronka's behalf, when the door opened and Staho himself, flail on shoulder, peeped in.

"Antek, will you come and thresh? The organist told me to get someone for his barley, which is dry and good, and comes splendidly out of the husk. . . . Philip begged me to take him; but if you will, here's work for you."

"Thanks kindly," was Antek's reply; "but I am not going to work at the organist's. Philip will do very well."

"Please yourself. Good day."

At her husband's refusal, Hanka had started up; but she at once bent down, her head over the cradle, to hide the tears that gushed forth.

"What! in this fearful winter, so poor that we have only a few potatoes and salt, and having not a stiver to bless



himself with . . . he refuses work offered! Sits all day long in the hut, smoking cigarettes and brooding! . . . Or else roams and prowls about like one distraught, seeking . . . what? The wind perhaps? O my God, my God!" she sobbed in her distress. . . . "And now, even Yankel will trust us no more: and we shall have to sell the cow. . . . True, it is not befitting that he should work on another peasant's land. . . . But what—what can we do?—Lord! were I a man, I would not spare myself nor shirk toil, but work till my arms dropped. . . . Alas! poor thing that I am, what can I do?" And she set about her household duties, now and then casting a furtive glance at Antek, who sat close to the hearth, with his eldest son on his lap, wrapped in his sheepskin, and chafed his little feet with a hand warmed at the fire, but sighed and stared moodily into the blaze the while. The old man was peeling potatoes at the window.

Silence had arisen between them, disquieting, pregnant with hidden griefs, and heightened by the stifling sensation of misery. They would not look into each other's eyes, nor talk; their words trailed off into complaints, their smiles faded and went out; in their looks flamed suppressed reproaches; in their pallid emaciated faces harsh feelings were to be read, and their minds burned with bitter resentment. Three weeks had passed since they had been turned from Boryna's door: so many long days and nights, and they had every detail of the expulsion yet distinct in their memories. The injury was as fresh as ever, the stubborn sense of revolt as strong.

The fire was now burning merrily, and its warmth spread through the room, till the frost melted on the window-panes, and the snow in the chinks outside the hut trickled down in water, while a little moisture oozed from the hard-beaten floor.

"Those Jews . . . are they coming?" she asked at length.

"They said they would."

And again not one word more. Indeed, who should speak first? Should Hanka? . . . She, who durst not open her

mouth, lest the gall that filled her heart should flow forth in spite of her!—Or Antek? What had he to say? That he was miserable? They both knew that. He never had been prone to make friends; and as to pouring out his heart, even to his own wife, he had no wish to do that! Besides, how could he speak, now that his soul was eaten up with hatred, and every memory made him writhe and clench his fists in such rage that he would willingly have vented it upon the whole village!

He now treasured no longer the sweet recollection of Yagna, any more than if he had never known her, than if he never had held in his arms the girl whom he now could tear in pieces.

And yet what he felt was not hatred. "Some women" (thus he thought of her) "are like stray dogs, always ready to follow anyone who offers a bigger morsel, or shakes a stick to be obeyed." Even these thoughts were not very frequent: in presence of the avalanche of deadly wrongs done him by his father, he forgot hers. The old man was guilty of all: yes, it was his father—the villain, the tyrant, the thorn in his side that ever rankled deeper and more cruelly!—it was through him—through him!—that all had come to pass.

Every evil inflicted, every suffering that he had undergone in these days, was garnered up in his bosom, and formed a horrible rosary of pangs and tortures; but he incessantly told the beads in his mind, that his memory of them might be fresh.

Of his poverty he made little account. He was a stalwart fellow: needed but a roof over his head, and no more.

"Let my wife," he thought, "see to the children."—What stung him above all the rest was the utter injustice shown to him. This he felt, continually more inflamed, as the rubbed sting of a nettle. What! In but three weeks, all the hamlet had come to look upon him as though he were an unknown intruder. No one spoke to him, no one looked in at his door, nobody had even a word of kind greeting for him. He felt himself an outlaw.



Well, if they did not come, he was not the man to beg them. But neither would he hide in a corner—far less yield an inch of the way to any. If they cared to have a fight, why, then, let them have it! . . . But now, why was all this? Because he had fought his father?—Aha! was that unheard of in Lipka? Did not Joseph Vahník fight his father every other day? Had not Staho Ploshka broken his father's leg? And yet no one had a word of blame for either! No, it was only he they were shocked at. Of course: "Whom God favours, His saints favour too"; and Boryna was as a god in Lipka!

All that time, breathing only revenge and the thought of it, he had lived on in a fever of excitement. He did not take to work, lost thought of his poverty, forgot all about the morrow: broken down after the agony gone through, he merely crawled hither and thither—a self-tormentor everywhere. Now and again he would rise in the night, to go about and roam along the roads or crouch hidden in dark corners, dreaming of vengeance, and swearing that he would never forgive.

They took breakfast together without one word; and he sat with eyes of bewilderment, ruminating the past—thorny bitter provender, hard to chew!

By now the day was getting on, and the fire had gone out. A cold whitish light from the snows outside shone through the partly thawed panes: the chilly dismal glare lit up every nook and showed the room in all its wretched nakedness.

Heavens! By the side of such a hut, Boryna's cabin was a mansion. Nay, any of his father's out-houses, even the cow-byre, was fitter for human abode. It was a foul sty, not a dwelling-place; a heap of rotted logs, dried dung, worthless rubbish! Not a single board to cover the bare ground, whose clay was honeycombed with holes filled up with frozen mud and sweepings, whence an odour worse than a manure-heap exhaled whenever the fire-place warmed the room. Above this quag of a floor rose the walls, warped and mouldy down which the damp trickled, and in whose



dark corners the Frost shook his hoary beard: walls with numberless holes, stopped with clay—or even, in some places, straw and cow-dung. The low ceiling hung down like a torn old sieve; there were fewer boards in it than holes, stopped with bundles of straw. Only the furniture and household utensils, together with the holy images on the walls, to some extent concealed this state of dire destitution; whilst the great press, and the horizontal pole across the room on which the clothes were hung, hid the wickerwork partition that separated the room from the byre. . . .

Hanka soon got through her work, though she had not to hurry: one cow, a heifer, a young pig and a few geese and fowls forming all her live stock, and indeed all her wealth. She dressed the boys, who presently went out into the passage to play with Veronka's children; the sound of their frolics was soon heard. Then she tidied herself up a little, as she expected the dealers, and would have to go to the village afterwards.

She particularly wished to talk the matter of the sale over with Antek beforehand; but she could not venture to speak first. He, still sitting by the fire that burned no more, was staring into the distance with a mien so sombre that it made her afraid.

What could it be that ailed him?

She took off her clogs, lest their clatter might annoy him, and cast in his direction more and more frequent glances full of affectionate disquietude.

"Ah," she thought, "it is harder, far harder for him than for other men!" and a great desire came over her to question him, to try and guess his sorrows, and mourn over them with him. Already she was standing by his side, ready with words of kindness, welling up from her loving heart. But then, how could she speak to him, if he paid no more heed to her than if she were not there? She heaved a sigh, for her heart was very heavy. Good God! how much better off so many another woman was—even though without a roof she could call her own! Should he raise his voice—nay, even his hand—against her, well, she would at

least know she had a living man by her side, and not a log of wood. "But he! . . . Not a word! Now and then he growls, as an angry dog would—or looks at me so that my blood runs cold. I cannot talk with him, nor open my heart in converse with him at all. A wife—what is that to him? A pair of hands to tidy the cabin—to cook his food—to nurse his children! Does he care for me in any wise? ever caress me, pet me, treat me tenderly, or even chat with me? All that has no interest for him: he keeps his mind aloof from all around him, makes himself as a stranger, and succeeds so well that he sees nothing that goes on. Yes, let the poor wife bear every burden on her own shoulders: suffer alone—come and go—trouble about all things: he will never pay her with one gracious word!"

She could no longer keep back her tears, the bitter overflow of her grief, and went out to the byre beyond the partition wall, where, leaning against the manger, she wept in silence; but when the cow Krasula, with a deep breath, set to licking her head and shoulders, she burst out into loud lamentations.

"And I shall lose you too, my poor beast! . . . They will come. . . . They are coming. . . . They will bargain for you . . . and then throw a rope round your horns . . . and lead you off, you that give us our food!" she murmured low, putting her arm round its neck, and turning with all the affection of her wounded heart towards this creature that felt for her.—No, this could go on no longer.—The cow was to be sold; then there would be nothing for them to eat! . . . And he refused to seek work! Had they not asked him to thresh? and he would not go. He might have earned one *zloty* ten kopeks daily. . . . That would have at least bought salt, and a little lard to make up for the milk that was to fail them now.

She returned to the dwelling-room, ready to speak her mind.

"Antek!" she cried, in a hard, determined voice.

Silently he raised his bloodshot eyes to hers, with a gaze of such immense anguish and sorrow that she was over-



whelmed with dread, while her heart thrilled with compassion.

"Did you say they had come for the cow?"

"They are surely on the way; dogs are barking down there."

"No, that is in Sikora's enclosure," she said after having gone out to look.

"They promised to come in the forenoon, and we have only to wait."

"Oh, *must* we sell?"

"Alas! we want money, and our pasture-land is not enough for Krasula and the heifer too.—Yes, we must, Hanka; what's to be done? I am sorry to lose the cow," he went on in a low voice, and with such sweetness of tone that Hanka felt spellbound, while her heart went pit-a-pat with great joy and hope: at that moment, she cared neither for the loss of the cow, nor any of their other misfortunes. And she gazed earnestly into his beloved face, listening to that voice of his which entered into her like a flame, and kindled such delightful feelings within her.

"Ah, yes, we must. Well, the heifer remains to us. She will calve about Mid-Lent, and so we shall have a little milk then," she chimed in, wishing only to hear him speak further.

"And if we should lack provender, we'll buy some."

"Oat-straw perhaps: our rye will last till spring.—Father, pray open our potato-pit: we must see if the potatoes we have are not frost-nipped."

"Father, stay where you are, the work is too hard for you: I'll do it."

He rose, took his sheepskin down from the pole, and went outside.

The snow was almost as high as the roof, for the cabin stood in an open place, almost out of the village, a field's length from the road, and with neither hedgerow nor orchard to keep the snow away. Several wild gnarled cherry-trees grew in front of the windows, but they were so buried in the drift that their branches alone stood protrud-



ing like human fingers twisted and bent by some disease.—Earlier in the day, the old man had already cleared away the snow in front of the cabin, but he had at the same time covered the mound<sup>1</sup> so deep that it was impossible to distinguish it in the snow.—Antek set vigorously to work: the snow stood as high as a man, and—though lately fallen—it had caked together and hardened so much that it had to be cut out in lumps; and he sweated enough ere the potato-pit was dug open. But he worked willingly, now and then throwing a few flitters at the children, who were playing outside the threshold. At times, however, he would pause in his work to lean back against the cabin-wall and look around. Then he would heave a profound sigh, and his soul would once more go astray like a sheep lost in the shadows of the night. The sky was all covered with a whitish cloud, which hung at no great height. The snows lay extended like a huge soft fleece, forming, as far as the eye could reach, an immense plain, white with a tinge of blue; the air, misty with suspended crystals of frost, seemed to wrap the whole world in a delicate pellucid tissue. As Bylitsa's hut was on rising ground, one saw thence the whole village spread out in a bird's-eye view: those lines of snow-clad mounds, like huge mole-hills, straggling away in long strings round the pond, none completely bare, but all hid by the white sheet spread over them. Here and there a granary wall stood out, darkly prominent; ruddy-brown coils of curling peat-smoke went up; or a few trees peered out, grey beneath the dazzling mantle in which they were enveloped; and athwart this world all of silver tinges, voices travelled swift and sharp, heard together with the flails' monotonous *rutta-rutta-rutta*, drumming underground, as it were. The ways were all snowed up; no one fared along them, nor did any living thing darken the silvery expanse of the fields. The hazy distances melted into one another, so that sky and earth were undistinguishable, save where the forest

<sup>1</sup>Over the potato-pits, dug deep as a protection from the cold, mounds are raised to protect them still more effectively.—*Translator's Note.*

made a faint blue stain on the white, as if some cloud were hanging at the horizon.

Antek's gaze wandered but for a little while over those snowy wastes; it presently returned and sought his father's cabin; and in the search his attention was diverted by a cry from Hanka, who had gone down into the potato-pit.

"Ha! they are not frozen! Vahnik's store has been so frost-bitten that half must be given to the swine to eat; and ours—ours is quite untouched!"

"That is good news.—Pray go out and see, for if I mistake not, the Jews are coming at last, and we must take the cow out of the byre."

"You are right: it is the Jews—who but they? Yes, it is.—Poisonous creatures!" she exclaimed with abhorrence.

Along a pathway just visible by the marks of Staho's boots, made when he went out in the morning, there came two Jews from the tavern, heavily plodding along, followed by half the dogs in the village (that greatly enjoyed this opportunity to bark at them) until Antek arrived and drove them away.

"Oh, how do you do?—We come late, on account of the snow.—Such drifts!—No driving through them, no getting through on foot even, I tell you. They have had to employ forced labour to make the road passable through the forest."

To these attempts at conversation he replied nothing, but made them enter his hut to warm themselves a little.

Hanka, having cleaned the cow's soiled flanks and milked away what had gathered since the morning, brought her through the room into the yard. The cow made resistance, unwilling to go out; on passing the threshold, she sniffed, stretched her head forth into the air, licked the snow, and on a sudden burst into long plaintive lowing, pulling so hard at the rope that old Bylica could scarcely hold her.

Hanka broke down. Seized with an unbearable pang, she burst out crying, as did the children too, holding to their mother's skirt.

Nor was Antek in much better mood. He ground his



teeth, leaned back against the cabin wall, and stared doggedly at a lot of crows that had assembled on the snow dug from the pit. The dealers meanwhile jabbered in Yiddish to each other, and proceeded to feel the cow and examine her critically.

The whole family, sick at heart, turned away in deep dejection from the beast tugging at her halter and vainly looking to her masters with great frightened eyes, and lowing in vain.

"O Lord!—Was it for this, Krasula, that I fed you so well, and cared for all your wants, that these men should now take you to the slaughter-house, and destroy you!" And in agony she struck the cabin wall with her head.

Alas! Wailing and lamenting were of no avail; for "What needs must be—no man can flee," as the saying is.

"How much?" the elder of the couple, a grey-bearded Jew, asked at last.

"Three hundred *zloty*." <sup>1</sup>

"What! for that scraggy brute—three hundred?—Anthony, is aught the matter with you?"

"Scraggy? Say ye no such word, or ye shall rue it! Scraggy! Look but at her—so young—scarce in her fifth year—and in such goodly condition!" So spoke Hanka, enraged.

"Pshaw! Pshaw! Who doth business, a word shall not anger him.—Say thirty roubles!"

"I have spoken."

"And I shall speak. Thirty-one? . . . Well, thirty-one and a half.—Thirty-two?—Then let it be thirty-two and a half. . . . It's a bargain?"

"I have said."

"My last word: three and thirty!"—"Take it or leave it," added the younger Jew phlegmatically, looking round for his staff, while the elder buttoned up his gaberdine.

Thereupon Bylitsa said, patting the cow's neck: "For such a beast as this!—O men, fear ye not God? A cow as

<sup>1</sup> In view of the bargaining that ensues, this must be counted as 45 roubles.—*Translator's Note.*



large as a byre!—Why, her hide alone will be worth half a score of roubles—O ye swindlers! ye murderers of Christ!”

But now the Jews began to chaffer eagerly, violently. Antek stood stubbornly to his price; and though he gave way a little, it was but little. Indeed, the cow Krasula was very valuable; and had he been selling it in spring and to another peasant, he would have got fifty roubles at least. But “Necessity drives to the mart, with Poverty drawing the cart.” This the Jews were perfectly aware of; and though they shouted louder and louder, and struck their hands in Antek’s with greater zeal to conclude the bargain, their offers rose by at most half a rouble each time.

Finally it came to this pass, that they started home in high dudgeon, and Hanka was leading the cow back to her shed, while Antek himself was angered and ready to renounce selling the beast at all—when lo! back they came again, and shrieked and swore that they could not possibly offer a higher price, and struck their hands in Antek’s again . . . till at last the man agreed to forty roubles, plus two *zloty* for old Bylica, as the holder of the rope.

They paid on the nail; the old man led the cow after them to the tavern where their sledge was waiting. Accompanied by the children, Hanka went with Krasula as far as the road, stroking her muzzle every now and then, affectionately bending over her, and quite unable to conceal her grief and affliction. . . .

She stood long upon the road, looking at Krasula as she was led away, and pouring out execrations on those unchristened “Yellow Ones.”

To lose such a cow as Krasula was!—No wonder if the poor woman felt her bosom overflow with gall!

When she came back, she said: “It is as if one of us had been borne to the churchyard”; and she still continued to peep into the empty stall, or to gaze through the window at the pathway marked by the hoofs which had but now passed there; and often and often did she give way to her distress, and shed tears again and again.

“Now then, will you have done?” Antek cried out, seat-

ing himself at the table where the money lay. "Why, the woman is for all the world like a calf; doth naught but weep and blubber."

"'He that suffereth naught will for nothing have thought,'" was Hanka's reply. "You suffered nothing, when you gave poor Krasula up to those Jews to be butchered."

"Aye, you'd rather have me open my own bowels to get you money!"

"And now we remain like the very last of hired servants—like *Dziads*—without one drop of milk, without one crumb of comfort! This—this is what my share of my own house and home have earned for me.—Merciful heavens! Other men work as hard as oxen, and bring something home; and this man sells the very last thing—the cow, my marriage portion, all I had from my family!" she went on in uncontrollable excitement.

"Being a fool and without understanding, you may bel-  
low at your ease.—Here's money for you. Pay what you owe, buy what you need, keep the rest." He pushed the roubles over to her, but, taking five from the heap, put them into his pocket-book.

"And why take so much money with you?"

"Why? I am not going to start off with nothing but my staff."

"Start off? and whither?"

"Anywhither, if it be but away from here. I will seek work, and not rot here in Lipka."

"*Away?* A dog is barefoot everywhere.—'Where'er the poor man goes, the wind against him blows.'—Ah! and I am to stay here alone, say? Am I?" And, raising her voice, she approached him with a threatening mien, not knowing what she did; he meanwhile took no notice of her, occupied as he was in taking down his sheepskin, putting his girdle on, and looking for his cap.

"Work for the peasants here? That I will not," he declared. "No; though I should starve; I will not!"

"The organist is in want of a thresher."



"That great man!—A calf who bleats in the choir, and is good for naught else; whose eyes are always on the farmers' money-bags, and who lives on what he gets out of them by begging or by lying!"

"Who has no goodwill shirks his duty still!"

"Enough! You're saucy!" he cried out in anger.

"When do I say a word to oppose you? You always do as you please, and I am nowhere!"

"I shall apply at the manors," he said presently, in a gentler tone. "I mean to inquire about service to be had, and perhaps may get something by Christmas. But I would rather be a common ploughman elsewhere than rot here, where the wrong done me stares me in the face at every step. That I cannot bear. I have enough of it—enough of being pitied by some, and looked upon by others as a mangy dog!" As he spoke, he waxed angrier and more highly wrought and Hanka, seized with terror, stood petrified and motionless: she had never yet seen him in such a state.

"Farewell. I shall return in a few days."

"Antek!"—The word was a despairing scream.

"What would you?" He turned upon the threshold.

"Do you grudge me even a friendly parting word?"

"Is it caresses you mean? Oh, I am in no mood for them just now." And he went out, slamming the door.

Uttering a hissing sound between his shut teeth, he walked on quickly through the snow with his staff. The crisp surface crunched underfoot. He looked round at the cabin. Hanka stood against the wall, dissolved in tears; through the other window, Veronka was watching them.

"Good for nothing in the world but weep, weep, weep again!—Now, forwards and away!" he said, with a glance that swept the snowy wilderness round him. Seized with a strange longing, he felt himself urged on, rejoicing in the thought of unknown hamlets and a new life in a fresh world. The feeling came upon him unexpectedly, and bore him away, as a suddenly swollen torrent carries with it a weakly-



rotted shrub, that can neither make head against it nor remain motionless.

An hour before, so far from making up his mind to go, he had never so much as entertained the thought. Ah! but now he would fly—fly away like a bird, go anywhere—to the forests, aye, and to the undreamed regions beyond them. Truly, why should he stay here to waste his life? what had he to expect here? The memories of the past had eaten him up, dried his heart: for what reason, then, should he cleave to them?—The priest was a good man, and had pointed out clearly to him that he stood no chance in an action against his father, which would besides be costly.—Vengeance?—That might wait till the right time: no man had ever yet wronged him with impunity. So now . . . let him go on—straight before him, no matter whither, if far enough from Lipka!

But whither first of all?

He now stood at a bend of the poplar road, gazing, not without some hesitation, over the fields which faded in the misty remoteness. "I shall go through the village and along the road beyond the mill." And he at once started that way.

Half a field's length before striking off the road, he had to turn aside; for under the poplars and down the middle of the way a sledge was rushing straight in his direction, with a cloud of snow-dust and a sharp jingling of bells.

It was Boryna, driving with Yagna. The horses tore along with lusty hoofs, the body of the sledge tossed like a feather behind them. The old man whipped them besides to make them go faster, and urged them on. He was speaking some words, too, and laughing! Yagna was talking in a loud voice, when she suddenly beheld Antek. Each for an instant looked into the other's eyes—and then had gone past. The sledge flashed by, and was engulfed in the snowstorm it had made; Antek stood in the same spot, looking round at them, and motionless. Now and again they appeared out of the cloud of snow-dust; Yagna's dress

fluttered red in the wind; now the bells would tinkle louder, and again fainter, inaudible, lost somewhere on that vast white plain, beneath the arch of frosted boughs and between the colonnade of dark trunks that sustained them. . . . These stood, as it were, drooping in a row, in their long and weary uphill procession towards the forest. But Antek was always aware of her eyes. They floated before him; they appeared, in the midst of the snow—everywhere—with that look of terror and of sadness; dreamy and pleased at once; keen of glance and laden with the hot fire of life!

He felt his soul extinguished, so to speak, veiled in a mist, frosted over and chilled to the core: but the deep-blue eyes were shining bright within him. Hanging his head, he dragged himself on with slow steps. More than once he glanced round, but nothing was visible beneath the poplar colonnade, save the blur of a snowy whirlwind fleeing away with a tinkling of far-off bells.

Oblivion of all things came over him, as though he had lost his memory by some strange happening. He stared helplessly, not knowing what to do . . . or where to go . . . or what had come to pass. He was as one in a dream—a waking dream, which he cannot shake off.

Almost unconsciously, he got to the tavern, passing several sledges full of folk, amongst whom he recognized no one, though he looked carefully.

"Where is that crowd of people bound for?" he asked Yankel, who was standing in the doorway.

"For the court. There's a lawsuit with the Manor about a cow, and herdsmen assaulted: you know the affair. Those are the witnesses; Boryna started before."

"Will they win?"

"Why should anyone lose? The complaint is against the Squire of Vola, and the Squire of Rudka is to be judge. Why should a Squire lose?—Besides, the folk will have an excursion, will improve the roads, will enjoy themselves; and the townsmen too need to do some business. So everybody will gain a little."

Antek was not listening to Yankel's mockery. He



ordered some strong vodka and, leaning against the bar, stood musing there for a full hour, without even tasting the liquor.

"Is anything ailing you?"

"What should ail me?—Let me into the private bar."

"Impossible. Dealers are there—great merchants, who have purchased another clearing from the Squire; that in Vilche Doly. They must have rest; nay, it may be they are sleeping now."

"I'll pull the scurvy rascals out by their beards!" Antek cried, and rushed madly to the private bar; but ere he got there, he changed his mind, and took his bottle to the darkest nook in the room.

The tavern was empty and still, save for the Jews talking together in their jargon, Yankel running to serve them, or someone coming in to order a glass, toss it off, and withdraw.

It was now past noon, and the frost no doubt increasing; for the sledge-runners creaked in the snow, and the tavern grew colder. But Antek remained in a brown study, unable to make out what was going on within him and around.

He took a dram, then another; but those eyes! They were always with him—dark-blue, turquoise-blue!—and so very near that his eyelids all but touched them.—A third dram, and they grew brighter still, and seemed to whirl about, as lights borne from one part of the room to another!—A cold shudder went through him; terrified, he started to his feet.

"Pay up, you!" shouted Yankel, blocking the way out.

"Pay up! I give you naught on trust."

"Out of my way, you dog's-blood Jew, or I kill you!" Antek shrieked, with such furious violence that Yankel changed colour and shrank away to let him pass.

He banged the door and rushed out.



## CHAPTER II

TOWARDS noon it had cleared up a little, but only as if a rushlight had been kindled and whisked about among the shadows; what brightness there was vanished soon, and it grew dark again, and looked as if the snow were gathering and about to fall once more.

In Antek's hut it was extremely murky and cold and cheerless. The children played upon the bed, and prattled in whispers to each other. Hanka was so uneasy, she knew not what to do. She went fidgeting about the place, or stood outside with burning eyes, gazing over the snow. But neither on the road nor in the fields did any living creature meet her sight; only a few sledges were just visible, crawling away from the tavern to vanish both from the eye and the ear, lost in the abyss of limitless white.

She sighed. If there were but a beggar passing by, that she might have someone to speak to!

She set to calling together the fowls that had dispersed, seeking to roost on the cherry-trees, and made them return to their usual roosting-place; but, on going in, had some words with Veronka. What did it mean? The woman had set down in the passage a pail of hog-wash for her swine, which the dirty beasts had splashed about, and there was a large pool right in front of Hanka's door!

Without going in, she cried through the closed door: "You who hold yourself such a good housewife, see to your pigs, or tell your children to do so. I will not dirty myself with mud for your sake!"

"Oh, she has sold her cow, and so she is going to raise her voice here, is she? She cannot bear mud now, the grand lady! Yet her dwelling is a pigsty!"

"Never you mind about my lodgings or my cow!"

"Then never you mind about my pigs; do you hear?"

Hanka slammed the door: what could she reply to such a fury? One word said to her was sure to bring more than twenty in return.—She bolted the door, took out the money, and began to make up her accounts with infinite trouble, blundering again and again. She was still upset; full of resentment against Veronka, of disquietude about Antek. Often, too, she fancied she could hear Krasula lowing; and then at times memories of her girlhood at home came back to her.

"True it is, though, too true, that our dwelling is like a pigsty!" she muttered, looking about the room.—But *there!* . . . There they had a floor, and the walls were white-washed, and all was warm and clean, and everything was in abundance. . . . And the work there, was it much? . . . Yuzka washed the things after dinner; Yagna spun, or looked out of the bright frostless windows. . . . What did she need, that she had not? . . . All the corals of Boryna's deceased wives were hers now; and petticoats, and kerchiefs, and linen in plenty. She had not to trouble, not to earn anything, and could eat her fill of fat things! And Staho had said, moreover, that Yagustynka did all the work for her; that she lay in bed till broad daylight, and had tea for breakfast, because, forsooth, "potatoes did not agree with her!" . . . And the old man did nothing but make love and fondle that woman as if she were a little child. . . .

The thought roused a storm of rage in her; she started up from the chest she sat on and shook her fist.

"Oh, the spoiler, the harpy, the wanton, the trull!" She screamed so loud that old Bylica, dozing close to the fire-place, started up in alarm.

She was calm in an instant. "Father, pray cover the potatoes with straw, and then heap the mound with snow: there is going to be a hard frost," she said, and returned to her accounts.

But somehow the old man's work did not get on. There was much snow, and he had little strength.—And then, he



felt uneasy: he had held the rope, and two *złoty* were for him: should he have them? They had been lying there on the table, glittering and almost new, as he well remembered.

"Perhaps they will give them to me," he thought. "To whom else do they belong? My arms are stiff with holding the rope, Krasula pulled so hard; I held on nevertheless. . . . And how I praised her to the cattle-dealers! Oh, I made them hear me! . . . Peter, the eldest boy—I should buy him a mouth-organ at the very first local feast. . . . And the younger one too should get something. . . . And Veronka's little ones too, naughty troublesome brats though they are. . . . And for myself, some snuff—strong—such as stirs one's inwards! Staho's snuff is good for little, does not even make me sneeze."

But these musings affected his work so much that when Hanka came round in an hour's time, the straw was only just covered with snow.

"Why, you eat enough for a man, and work less than a child!" she said.

"Ah, Hanka, I am working hard, but I just stopped a moment to breathe: I shall finish instantly—instantly!" he stammered, greatly abashed.

"The twilight is coming down from the forest, the frost is growing harder, and the pit looks as if swine had been rooting there. Go ye into the hut and tend the babes."

She herself set to work, and with such energy that the pit was very soon covered up and splendidly heaped over with snow.

But when she had done, it was already dusk; the dwelling had become colder; the damp clay floor, stiff with the frost, clattered beneath her clogs; and once more the frost painted its patterns on the panes. The children, too, whimpered low; but she did nothing to quiet them, for she was in haste. She had to cut straw for the heifer, and feed the pigs, that came squealing and nuzzling against the door, and give water to the geese. Besides, she must go over the accounts again—find how much she was to pay, and to whom. At last all was done, and she prepared to go out.



"Father, you will light the fire, and take care of the babes.—Should Antek come back, there is cabbage for him in the saucepan on the hob."

"Yes, yes, Hanka, I shall see to everything.—The cabbage is on the hob; yes, I shall see, I shall see to it."

"Ah!—About the rope-money, I have taken it. You do not want it, surely? You have food to eat; you have clothing. . . . What more do you need?"

"Yes, Hanka, yes; I have everything—everything," he replied in a low voice, turning quickly round to the children, lest she should see his tears fall.

As she went out, the cold gripped her. A bluish darkness was spreading on every side, dry and peculiarly transparent. The sky was clear as crystal, with unclouded horizon, and a few stars already twinkling on high.

On her way, Hanka mused. She thought she would try to find some sort of work that Antek could do, and not let him go away.—But now his last utterance came back to her, and made her faint with alarm. For never in her life could she leave her village to live elsewhere; no, never could she abide among strange folk!

She gazed on the road, the houses scattered along it, the orchards scarce seen above the snow, and the immense fields all around, now growing grey in the twilight. The silent ice-cold evening fell faster and faster: star after star came out, as if someone up there was sowing them by handfuls; and upon the glimmering earth, glimmering in snowy-white expanses, the cabin lights began to shine, smoke shed its scent through the air, men went slowly about the ways, and voices seemed skimming very low along the ground.

"All this has grown into me, is part of me; and I will not stray about the world like a wandering wind. Oh, no!" she said with energy to herself, walking now somewhat slower; for from time to time she met with caked snow that broke and let her in up to the knees.

"This is the world which our Lord has given me—mine! Here will I live and here will I die.—If we can but hold out till the spring! . . . Say that Antek refuses to do any

work. Well, I shall not be forced to beg. I will take up spinning—or weaving—or anything I can turn my hand to, and not let misery conquer me. Veronka, I know, earns enough by her weaving to put money by.”

Such were her thoughts as she entered the tavern, where Yankel was as usual nodding over a book. He paid no attention to her till she set the money before him; then he smiled in friendly wise, helped her to reckon the sum right, and even offered her some vodka. But he said no word to her either of Antek's debt to him or of the man himself, until she was about to depart; when he asked her what her husband was doing.

She replied that he was seeking work.

“He would be useful in the village. They are putting up a saw-mill here, and I need someone experienced in carting timber.”

“My husband would never go into tavern service.”

“Is he such a great man as that? Then let him slumber and sleep!—But ye have some geese: if ye will, fatten them a little, and I will purchase them when yule-tide comes.”

“I cannot sell any; I have but enough for breeding.”

“Then buy some goslings for the spring; as soon as they are well fed up, I'll take them. And if you care, you may have all on credit here, and you will pay me in geese.—A running account . . .”

“No, I shall not sell any geese.”

“Oh, but you will, when the money from your cow is gone . . . and sell them cheap, too!”

“Scurvy one! you'll not live to see the day!” was her mental comment as she went out.

The air was so frosty now, it made the nostrils tingle. The heavens were scintillating, and a bleak piercing blast blew from the woods. Nevertheless, she kept her course right in the middle of the road, gazing with interest at all the cabins. Vahnik's, next the church, had all the candles lit; from Ploshka's enclosure came a hum of voices and the



squealing of swine; at the priest's, the windows shone bright, and several horses pawed the ground impatiently in front of his veranda; at the Klembas', too, opposite the priest's, lights were gleaming, and you could tell, by the crackling of the crunched snow, that someone was going to the byre. Further, in front of the church, where the village forked out and seemed stretching forth two arms that clasped the pond in their embrace, but little met the eye beyond a few lights on a dusky white background, in which dogs were heard to bark.

Heaving a sigh as she glanced over at her father-in-law's cabin, she turned off from before the church to pass between two long fences that separated Klemba's orchard from the priest's garden, and together formed a road leading to the organist's. This was little trodden and so much overshadowed with underwood on either side, that ever and anon showers of snow fell on her from the trees she brushed against.

The dwelling was situated in the background of the priest's court-yard, and had no other separate cartway.

Hanka was presently aware of an outcry and the sound of sobbing, and beheld outside the entrance a black box and various articles scattered on the snow—a feather-bed, some wearing-apparel, and so forth. . . . Magda, the housemaid at the organist's, stood by the wall, crying bitterly and screaming aloud.

"They have turned me out! They have driven me forth! Like a dog! Out into the world, the wide, wide world! Whither shall I go now—bereft of all—oh, whither?"

"You swine, you swine, scream not thus at me!" cried a voice from the open entrance-passageway; "or I'll take a stick, and make you hold your peace pretty quickly. Begone this instant, and betake you to your Franek, you jade!—Ah, how are you, Hanka? . . . My dear, this business you see was to be expected since autumn. And I pleaded with that wench, I talked to her, implored, watched over her; but who can guard a wanton? When we all were sleeping, out she



would go a-walking . . . and has walked so well that now she has a bastard for her pains!—How often did I say: ‘Magda, take care; consider: the man will never marry you’ . . . and she would declare to my face that she had naught to do with him! And when I saw the creature changing form and swelling like leavened dough, I said to her: ‘Go to some other hamlet, hide yourself, ere people see your shame.’ Did she listen? No.—And to-day, while milking in the byre, she was taken with great pangs and upset the milking-pail; and my girl Franka ran to me in a fright, crying out that something had befallen Magda. Good Lord! such a disgrace, and in my house!—Take yourself off now, or I’ll have you cast out on to the road!” she cried again, coming out in front of the house.

Magda left the cabin wall and, with many a sob and moan, set to making all her things into a bundle.

“Do come in now; it is cold.—But you! leave no trace behind you!” shouted the dame, as she went in.

She led Hanka in through a long passage.

There was a very large low room, lit by a big fire that burned bright on an open hearth. Red as boiled crayfish, the organist, in his shirt-sleeves rolled up to the elbows, sat baking altar-breads at the fire. Every now and then he dipped a ladle into a dish of thin half-liquid paste, and poured the contents into a cast-iron mould, which he then closed, squeezing it till the hot paste hissed.<sup>1</sup> He then placed it on the fire, supporting it on an upright brick set there, and, opening and turning it round, took out the newly baked bread, which he cast upon a low bench just by. Here sat a little boy, trimming the edges of each of the oblong loaves with scissors.

<sup>1</sup> This is the instrument used to make the Altar-breads (or Communion Breads well known outside the Catholic pale, but much thicker; the Catholic Altar-breads are semi-transparent).—In Poland, the organist goes round the parish at Christmas-time, offering packets of these breads with his good wishes, and receiving such gifts as may be offered to him. This practice naturally entails some contempt towards him on the part of peasants.—*Translator's Note.*

Hanka greeted them all, and kissed the hand of the organist's wife.

"Sit down and warm yourself.—And now, what news?"

Unable to find at once the words she wanted, and feeling ashamed, she gave a timid side-glance into the other room, where, opposite the door, and on a long table, stood a white pile of altar-breads, pressed down with a board. A couple of girls were making them into packets, each tied with a paper wrapper for distribution. From the unseen portion of the room came the monotonous tinklings of a harpsichord twangling under some unknown performer's fingers—and suddenly breaking off with a jarring discord that gave Hanka gooseflesh and made the organist exclaim:

"There, there—quite wrong: you've 'eaten a fox!'—Repeat from '*Laudamus pueri.*'"

"Are you making these for Christmas already?" she asked, feeling it would be discourteous to sit silent.

"We are. The parish is big and straggling; and, as all the altar-breads have to be taken round before Christmas, we must begin betimes."

"Are they of pure wheat?"

"Pray taste them."

She gave her one that was still hot from the mould.

"I scarcely dare to eat of it." She took it with a corner of her apron, holding it up to the light with awed and respectful scrutiny.

"Why, what curious designs are stamped upon it!"

"On that first circle, to the right, you see our Blessed Lady, St. John, and our Lord. On the other there is the manger, the rack, the cattle, the Child on its couch of hay, St. Joseph, and again our Lady; and here are the Three Wise Men, kneeling." Such were the explanations of the organist's wife.

"Yes, yes; I see.—Oh, how wonderfully these designs are made!"

She wrapped the altar-bread in a kerchief and put it in her bosom.—A peasant had entered and told the organist something; at which he cried:



"Michael! They have come for a christening: take the key and go to the church. His Reverence knows and will come, but Ambrose must stay to serve the company."

The harpsichord became mute, and a tall pale lad passed out of the room.

"My brother's orphan boy. Practises to learn playing with my husband, who teaches him gratis. We must make a sacrifice, and do something for our own flesh and blood."

Little by little, Hanka became more communicative, and at last brought out the story of her sufferings and troubles, though piecemeal and with much hesitation. It was the first time she had been able to speak openly of all that had passed.

They listened and talked to her with sympathy; and though they took good care not to mention Boryna's name, they showed her so much sincere compassion that it made her weep very copiously. Now the organist's wife, being a clever intelligent woman, understood what Hanka wanted, and came out the first with a proposal.

"Listen: you may perhaps have a little spare time.—Would you spin some wool for me? I thought I would get it done by Pakulina, but 'tis better you should do it."

"May God reward you! I was indeed in want of work, but durst not ask for it."

"Well, well, no thanks: folk ought to help their neighbours. The wool is carded, and weighs about a hundred pounds."

"Yes, I shall spin it, and am well able. Why, when with my parents, I not only spun thread but wove cloth and dyed it. We never had to buy garments."

"Look at it: how soft it is! and how dry!"

"'Tis beautiful wool. From the Manor sheep, belike."

"Ah, and should you happen to need flour or groats or pease, pray let me know; you shall have all you want, and I will settle when I pay you."

She then took her into a store-room full of sacks and barrels of corn, and flitches of bacon hanging from the walls. The rafters bore long skeins of spun yarn in



clusters, and on the floor thick rolls of linen cloth lay piled up. As to the strings of dried mushrooms, the cheeses, the jars crammed with various good things, the shelves groaning under huge round loaves, and the other articles of household consumption, who could tell them all?

"You shall have the smoothest yarn that hands can make," said Hanka. "And thanks once more for all your kindness. But I fear I shall be unable to carry all that wool by myself."

"It will be taken over to you."

"That is well, for I have still to go about the village."

She again thanked her, but now with something less of warmth and expansiveness: envy was gnawing at her heart.

"'Tis our people gives them all they have, carries it to them, and produces the same . . . and their store-rooms overflow by our gifts! Besides, who knows how much money they have out at high interest? Ah, 'Who has sheep to shear, he shall have good cheer.' . . . It were harder work for them to produce all this.—Well, well!" So she thought on her exit from the house, whence Magda had now disappeared with all her things; and as it was getting late, Hanka quickened her pace.

Where—and of whom—could she inquire about work for Antek?

When on her father-in-law's farm, she had found everybody friendly; people were constantly coming to visit her, either to get some service done or to exchange kind looks and words. And now there she was, standing out in the cold, and knowing not to whom she could go!

She stopped in front of Klemba's, and of Simon's too: but she was loath to enter, for now she recollected how Antek had told her not to make any calls. "People can do nothing, and will give no assistance—only pity; and that they would give just as well to a dead dog!" he had said.

"How true, oh, how true he spoke!" she said, remembering the organist and his wife.

Oh, had she but been a man! She would have set to work at once, and put everything to rights. She would not then

have had to whine and lay bare her wounds that her neighbours might pity her!

She experienced in her soul a devouring, a ravenous craving for work, and such a concentration of force as stiffened her frame and gave firmness and speed to her steps. She also felt a longing to pass near her father-in-law's cabin, were it but to look at the premises from without, and satisfy the desire of her eyes! But in front of the church door she turned away to follow a narrow path that led over the frozen pond to the mill; and she walked fast, not looking to right or left—careful only not to slip on the ice, determined to pass swiftly by and see nothing, lest her heart should be wounded again by the remembrance of the past. But she failed. Somehow, just opposite Boryna's, she stopped suddenly, and could not take her eyes away from the lights that glimmered in the windows.

"It is ours—ours! . . . How can we possibly go from here? . . . The blacksmith would seize it instantly. No! I do not budge hence. Here shall I stay, like a watch-dog, whether Antek stays or not! . . . His father is not immortal; and other changes too may come about. . . . I will not see my children despoiled, nor will I go from the village." These thoughts passed through her mind, as she gazed upon that snow-covered orchard, and the faint outlines of buildings beyond: the silvered roofs, the dark-tinted walls, and—in the background, behind a shed—the sharp cone of a haystack.

The night was still, cold, black-hue, oversprinkled with a sand of stars, it seemed, and wrapping the snowy earth in silvery folds. The trees stood drooping under the weight of snow that bent them down, as if slumbering incomprehensibly in the stillness which flooded the world: white-sheeted phantoms, vapoury, yet rigid. Every voice had died away; only something—was it the breathing of those entranced inanimate trees? was it a murmur from the quivering stars?—something there was that trembled in the air. And there stood Hanka, forgetful of the minutes which went



by, forgetful of the sharp intolerable cold, her eyes staring on that homestead, greedily drinking the sight of it, taking it all into her heart, absorbing it with all the strength of her insatiable dreams.

A sudden crackling in the snow woke her up: someone was coming by the same path across the pond, and in a little she looked upon Nastka.

"What, you, Hanka?"

"Why such amazement? Am I dead, and is it my ghost you see?"

"What fancy has taken hold of you? I had not seen you for a long time, and was surprised.—Which way are you going?"

"To the mill."

"My way too; I am taking Matthew his supper."

"Is it a miller's trade he is learning there now?"

"A miller's? No, indeed! They are building a sawmill here in such great haste that they are now working at it even at night."

They walked on together, Nastka prattling away, but careful to say no word about Boryna; and Hanka, though she would have been glad to hear, feeling that she could not possibly ask.

"Does the miller pay well?"

"Matthew gets five *zloty* fifteen *groschen*."

"So much as that?"

"No great wonder, since he is at the head of everything."

Hanka said no more till, passing in front of the smithy, whence a ruddy light flowed through the unpaned window, crimsoning the snow, she muttered:

"That Judas! Never in want of work to do!"

"He has engaged an assistant, and is himself continually travelling. Also he is with the Jews in that forest business, and occupied with them in deceiving the people."

"Do they cut down the clearing yet?"

"Are you dwelling in the woods, that you do not know?"

"Not so; but I am not greedy for village news."



"Well, let me tell you, they are cutting down a bit of the forest that was already bought."

"Of course; our folk would never permit them to fell the trees on our clearing."

"Even for that, who would interfere? The Voyt holds with the Manor folk, and the Soltys too, and all the wealthier men."

"True. Who is it can get the better of a rich man? or who can overcome him?—Well, Nastka, pray look in at our home."

"Farewell.—Yes, I shall bring distaff and spindle one of these days."

They separated in front of the miller's dwelling, and Nastka went on to the mill, down below, while Hanka passed through the yard into the kitchen. She had great trouble in getting there; a number of dogs swarmed round her, barking and driving her to the wall. Eva came to protect her and usher her in; and just then the miller's wife arrived, saying:

"If you have business with my husband, he is in the mill."

She met him coming back to his house; he took her to the family room, where she immediately paid all she owed for meal and groats.

"You are living on your cow, hey?" he said, throwing the money into a drawer.

"What would you have?" she replied, offended. "One cannot live on stones."

"Your goodman is a sluggard, let me tell you."

"So you say. But what work is he to do? where? with whom? Tell me."

"Are no threshers needed here?"

"Of course such work is not to his taste; he was never yet a common farm-labourer."

"I am sorry for the man. He's headstrong, without respect for his father, and fierce as a wolf; all the same, I am sorry."

"I—I have heard—that you, Sir Miller, have work to be

done; perhaps you might employ Antek. . . . I beseech you . . ." Here she fell a-weeping and imploring him very earnestly.

"Let him come.—Mind, I do not ask him. Work there is, but hard work. To hew the trees into logs—ready to be sawn."

"That he can do: few men in the village as well."

"That's why I say, Let him come.—But you, my woman, you do not look after him properly. Not at all."

She stood amazed, having no idea of what he meant.

"The fellow has a wife of his own. Children too. And yet he is running after another man's wife."

Hanka turned white; the words were a thunderbolt.

"It's true what I say. He wanders nightly. Has been seen out more than once."

Her relief was immense, and she breathed freely again. She knew all about it . . . how he was driven to wander by the memories of the wrongs suffered. Oh, she understood him well! but the folk had painted things the colour they preferred.

"It may be that work, if he sets to it, will drive love-making from his mind."

"He is a farmer's son . . ."

"Oh, yes! Quite a Squire, is he not? And he would pick and choose, just like swine before a full trough. If he is so hard to please, why did he quarrel with his father? why run after Yagna? For think of the sin and the shame of it!"

"Sir!" she exclaimed, hastily. "What on earth are you thinking of?"

"I only say the thing that is. All Lipka knows. You may ask," he rapped out jerkily, in a loud voice; for he was a very impulsive man, who always liked to blurt out things just as they were.

"Well, but may he come here?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"He may. To-morrow, if he cares.—What ails you? what are these tears for?"

"Nothing . . . nothing but the cold."



And she went away, with slow, heavy footsteps, scarcely able to crawl along. The world had grown dark for her, the snow was grey now, she could not find the path she came by, and tried in vain to brush away the tears that were freezing on her lashes. So she walked on, wrapped in darkness, very sudden—and dolorous—O Lord! how dolorous!

"He, in love with Yagna! . . . With Yagna!" She stood breathless, her heart fluttering like a shot bird.

"But perhaps it is a falsehood; the man may have lied!" In her fright she clung to this possibility and clutched at it with both hands.

"Lord! was there not enough of misery and humiliation already, but this—this too must fall upon my wretched head?" She gave way to her grief for a moment, moaning aloud; then, to overcome it, began to run as though wolves had been on her track, so that she entered her hut all panting and more dead than alive.

Antek had not returned.

The little ones were on their grandfather's sheepskin, spread out as a rug before the fire-place, and he was making a little windmill to amuse them.

"Hanka, they have brought wool—brought it in three sacks."

She opened them, and at the top of one found a loaf, some bacon, and at least half a gallon of groats.

"God bless her for her generous heart!" she said, much moved, and thereupon prepared a plentiful supper, and afterwards at once put the children to bed.

The whole cabin was very quiet now. On Veronka's side they had gone to bed already, and her father had fallen asleep in his pallet near the fire. But Hanka remained in front of the hearth and span.

She span long and far into the night, even to the first cock-crow, and as she twisted the thread, so too she revolved in her mind the miller's words: "He is running after Yagna."—Yagna!

The spinning-wheel hummed busily, monotonously, tranquilly. Night, with frozen face, looked in at the window,



and rattled at the panes, and sighed, pressing close against the wall. The cold came creeping out of the corners, caught at her feet, spread itself in hoary blotches over the clay floor; crickets struck up their ditty, somewhere behind the hearth, and only held their peace when either of the children cried out in his sleep or turned in his bed. Yet more intense grew the frost, clutching all things and pressing them in his iron claws: many a time did the planks overhead crack and creak, and fissures were cloven in the old bulging walls with a noise like a pistol-shot, and fibres in some beam broke, with a rull report. Surely the cold had penetrated even to the house-foundations; they shuddered at times, it seemed, with the pain of it, and the hut itself shrank together, crouching and quaking in the dreadful frost.

"Why did the thought of this never come to me? Aye, she—so well-favoured, so well-knit, so comely to behold! And I—a poor thin creature, merely skin and bones! Have I the power to attract him? dare I even try? If I should give my heart's blood, it were naught: he cares no whit for me. What am I to him?"

Helplessness, still but torturing—how cruelly torturing!—now took possession of all her being. She was even beyond shedding tears. She felt as if she were a shrub that the frost is killing, that is as unable to avoid its doom as to cry for help or to protect itself: anguish was riving her soul as the frost rives the shrub. Resting her head on her wheel, she dropped her hands and looked out into vacancy, musing on her lot. Long, long did her reverie last, with only at times a few burning tears falling from her heavy eyelids on the wool, there to freeze into a rosary of anguish—tears, as it were, of blood.

The next day she rose somewhat calmer. This was of course; the storm had had time to blow over. What the miller said might or might not be true; but should she droop and complain, now that everything was on her shoulders—the children, and the house matters, and all the trouble and woe?

Who would see to things, unless she did? She knelt down

before our Lady of Sorrows, and prayed fervently; and, begging our Lord to set things to rights, she made a vow that she would go on foot to Chenstohova in the spring, and have three masses said, and—as soon as she should be able—take a great lump of wax to the church for tapers to be made of it.

Greatly relieved by this vow, she was able to do plenty of spinning; but the day, though bright and sunny, seemed immeasurably lengthy to her, and her anxiety about Antek increased.

He came at last, but only in the evening, at supper-time, and looking so worn and subdued, and greeting her so kindly! He had bought some rolls for the little ones.

She almost forgot her suspicion. And when he also went to cut straw for fodder, and helped her with the animals, she felt tenderly and deeply agitated.

However, he neither told her where he had been nor what he had done, and she did not venture to question him.

When supper was over, Staho came in: a thing he frequently did, in spite of Veronka's prohibition; and a little later, quite unexpectedly, who should drop in but old Klemba? They were not a little surprised, for since their expulsion no one in the village had been to call upon them yet: it seemed clear enough that he had come on some business or other.

But he told them quite simply that he had come to see them because nobody else came.

They were sincerely and deeply grateful.

Sitting one alongside of the other on the bench in front of the fire, they then entered into grave and serious conversation, while old Bylica now and then put more fuel on the hearth.

"A pretty sharp frost, is it not?"

"So sharp," said Staho, "one can hardly thresh without sheepskin and gloves on."

"The worst is that wolves are about!"

All stared at Klemba in astonishment.



"Oh, 'tis quite true. Last night they were at the Voyt's, burrowing under the sty. Something must have frightened them away, for they did not get at the pig: but the burrow ran quite beneath the foundations; I went myself at noon to see. There must have been five of them at least."

"That, beyond all doubt, betokens a hard winter."

"Yes, the frosts have only just begun, and behold, the wolves are here!"

"Near Vola," Antek said, with much animation, "on the road beyond the mill, I saw tracks of a whole pack, crossing the way slantwise; but I fancied they were the Manor hounds. Very like, they were wolves."

"Went ye as far as the clearing?"

"Not so; but I hear it said they are only felling the wood bought close to Vilche Doly."

"The keeper told me the Squire will not take a single man from Lipka to work there: punishing them, I suppose, because they stand up for their rights."

"Who is to cut down the trees, if not the men of Lipka?" Hanka asked.

"My good Hanka, there are folk in plenty seeking work, begging for work. Are there few in Vola itself? few in Rudka? and in Debica, are the paupers fewer? Let the Squire but lift up his voice: he will find hundreds of able-bodied peasants who will swarm round him the very same day. So long as they fell trees only on the purchased land, let them do so by all means; there is but little of it, and besides, it is too far from our village."

"What if they set to work on our<sup>1</sup> forest too?" Stach inquired.

"That we will not permit!" Klemba replied, briefly and with emphasis. "We will fight it out, and the Squire shall learn who is the stronger—he or all the people. Yes, he shall learn."

<sup>1</sup> Our here means only, of course, "that part of the forest on which we claim to have a right to cut wood for fuel, and which the Squire cannot sell without our permission."



Here they dropped the subject, which was a matter too burning to please anyone; but not before old Bylica had, in stammering and hesitating tones, had his say about it:

"I know that generation of the Squires of Vola, I know them well: they will steal a march upon you somehow."

"Let them try," said Klemba. "We are not little children. They shall not succeed." And no more was said.

Then they spoke of Magda, and how the organist had expelled her. Here again, Klemba gave his decision:

"Aye, the deed was not very charitable. But then one cannot force them to set up an infirmary in their home for Magda, who is neither kith nor kin to them."

The talk then became desultory, and the guests left them somewhat late. As he went, Klemba, after his short-spoken and simple fashion, told them, "if they lacked of aught, just to let him know, and he would behave as a neighbour should do."

And now Antek and his wife were alone.

Hanka hesitated a long time; but at last, after many timorous catchings of the breath, she asked him if he had found any work.

"No. I was at more than one manor, and looked about me there, and among the folk too; but I found nothing." This he said with a low voice and eyes on the ground; for though he had indeed wandered about, he had done nothing more, and made no attempt to get work.

They went to bed. The children were asleep by this time; they lay at the foot of the bed for the sake of greater warmth. Darkness reigned, save for the moonbeams that darted through the sparkling frozen panes and threw a luminous band obliquely athwart the room; but the two could not sleep. Hanka tossed from side to side, considering whether she had better tell him about the sawmill now, or wait till the morrow.

"Yes, I went seeking work. But even had I found something, I would not have left the village. To go astray about

the world like a masterless dog is not to my liking." So he whispered, after a protracted silence.

"Why, that is just what I too was thinking—just the very same as you!" she said joyfully. "Why go away and seek for bread, when we can get quite good work here at home? The miller assured me he had something for you to do at the sawmill, and that you might begin to-morrow. You would get two *zloty* fifteen *groschen*!"

"What?" he snarled. "Did you go a-begging to him?"

"No, no," she explained in much fear. "I only went to pay what I owed him; and he told me himself he intended to send for you."

Antek did not answer. The two lay motionless and speechless side by side; but sleep fled from their eyes. They were thinking, thinking, down in the mysterious depths of their minds; sometimes breathing a sigh, or at others letting their souls melt away in the dull dead stillness. Outside, far, far and faint on the country-side, they heard dogs bay-ing, and cocks flapping their wings, and crowing at midnight, and the muffled murmur of the wind sighing overhead.

"Do you sleep?" She crept a little closer to him.

"No.—Slumber has forsaken me."

He was on his back, his hands clasped behind his head. So near her! yet in heart and thoughts so far off! He lay very still, almost without breathing, forgetful of everything; for once more Yagna's eyes shone out of the dark—deep blue in the moonlit night.

Hanka approached him yet nearer, and rested her burning face upon his shoulder. No suspicions now remained in her heart, nor any regrets, nor the least drop of bitterness; only true love, faithful affection, full of trust and self-surrender. And she came close—close to his heart.

"Antek," she asked him with a thrill of eagerness, "will you go to work to-morrow?" She was so fain—so longing to hear his voice, and converse with him, heart to heart.

"Perhaps I shall. Yes, I must go; I must." But his mind was filled with other thoughts.

"Pray, Antek, go. Go, I pray you." With a tender appeal, she put her arm around his neck, and sought his lips, which hardly breathed, with the burning kisses of her mouth.

Not the least emotion did he feel. He paid no heed to her embraces, he was not even aware of her at all, as with eyes wide open he gazed into those other eyes—Yagna's eyes.



### CHAPTER III

**I**T was not very early in the morning when the miller took Antek on as a workman, and, leaving him in the yard amongst great piles of logs, went to Matthew, who was just then getting some timber placed in the sawmill, and setting the saws in motion. After a few words with him, he called out to Antek:

"Then you are to work here, and obey Matthew in everything: he is my deputy." So saying, he walked away, for a very bleak and piercing wind was just then blowing from the river.

"I suppose you have no ax?" Matthew inquired, after coming down and greeting him in a friendly way.

"I have brought a hatchet: I was not aware . . ."

"You might as well use your teeth. The wood is frozen hard, and brittle as glass: a hatchet would not bite into it. For to-day, I'll lend you an ax; but you will have to whet it. And to a flat edge, mind.—Bartek, get to work with Boryna and let this oak-log be ready presently: the other will have been sawn in no time."

From behind an enormous log that lay in the snow, there rose up a tall and wiry but stooping figure of a man, wearing clogs and red-striped trousers with a pipe in his mouth, a grey sheepskin cap on his head, and a tawny leather furred jacket on his back. Resting himself on his ax, he whistled through his teeth, and exclaimed merrily:

"We are going to be wedded together. All right. We shall be a happy pair, and never fall out or fight!"

"A fine forest. The trees are as straight as tapers."

"Aye, but full of knots all the same. 'Tis awful . . . as if the timber had been sown with flints. The days are few, when the ax is not notched by them. You mustn't

sharpen your ax quite smooth, but draw it along the grindstone, whetting it on one side only. That makes the edge stronger, you see. And deal with the iron as when you want to manage somebody—you find which way he is to be taken, and how; and then you lead him like a dog on a string.—The grindstone is in the mill, by the groat-bin.”

In a very short time indeed Antek was at work, cutting off the projecting spurs, and hewing the log to a rectangular shape along marks made with tar by Bartek. But he was taciturn and moody, and resentful of having—he, who was a Boryna!—to do the biddings of such a one as Matthew.

“Not bad, your work, not bad at all!” Bartek remarked.

And indeed his work was excellent: the art of fashioning logs was not unknown to him. But it was hard labour for one unaccustomed to it, and after a time he was out of breath, and perspiring to such an extent that he took his sheepskin off. But the frost was hard and held pitilessly; he had constantly to stand and work deep in the snow; his hands were so benumbed, they almost stuck to the ax-handle, and the time seemed so long to him, he could scarcely hold out till noon.

Yet he would take neither bite nor sup for dinner, only dry bread and river water; nor would he even enter the mill, for fear lest he should meet some acquaintance, come to bring corn and awaiting his turn. He stayed out in the frozen air, sitting close to the wall as he crunched his bread and gazed up at the sawmill shed, built over the river, one of its sides touching the main building, so that the stream from the four mill-wheels swept under it with a great rush of green water, making the shed above to vibrate.

But he had not yet rested properly, nor had a good breathing-space, when Matthew, who had dined with the miller, shouted as he came out:

“To work, men! To work!”

So, much against his will, and groaning over the shortness of his noonday rest, he was forced to pull himself together and once more take up what he had to do.

All were in lively movement and worked briskly; the frost



was so intense, and Matthew urged them with so much zeal.

The mill clattered unceasingly; beneath its wheels, all overgrown with icicles like a long greenish mane, the stream went rushing noisily on. The saws rasped away with continuous crackling harshness, as the sound of one biting glass to bits, and they spat the yellow sawdust forth. Matthew was everywhere, active and indefatigable, always shouting and urging the toilers to hurry up. He filled with whole place, nimble as a goldfinch pecking at hempseed; his short red-striped spencer, his grey sheepskin cap, were seen flying about over the trodden snow covered with chips, where they were getting the logs ready—ordering, scolding, laughing, joking, whistling, and working as hard as any; but for the most part on the platform close to the saws. For this sawing-shed had no side-walls, only a roof; so that its whole interior was visible from outside. It rose above the river on four stout piles, against which the current rushed with such force and fury that the roof, made of reeds and resting only on those piles, often trembled like a wisp of straw in a gale.

"A good craftsman he is, that fellow!" quoth Antek, with unwilling recognition.

"And well paid too!" Bartek growled in reply.

They beat their arms against their chests to keep off the increasing cold, and went on working silently.

Of workmen there were enough. Two were at the saws, rolling the sawn logs down to the yard and dragging up fresh ones; two more were cutting off the one end of each log that had been left untouched, and making the sawn planks into piles or carrying into a shed those too thin to bear the outside cold; and a couple of others were stripping the bark off oak and fir and pine logs. To these last, Bartek used often to shout in jest:

"Devil take you, how ye skin them! Ye'll be past-masters in dog-flaying, belike!"

But they objected to such jokes, for they never had anything to do with the dog-killer's craft.

All these men Matthew kept so hard at work that they



could only seldom and by stealth find means to run round to the mill, warm their freezing hands, and come back at a gallop, pressed hard by the work itself.

Twilight was nearly over when Antek crawled home, so weary and broken that every bone in him ached. After supper he went to bed at once and, falling asleep, slept as one dead.

Hanka had no heart to inquire about anything, but tried to make him as comfortable as she could, keeping the children quiet, asking her father to make no noise with his boots, and walking barefooted in the room herself; and when he prepared at daybreak to go to work, she boiled a pot of milk for him to take with potatoes for breakfast, that he might feed better and be warmed.

"Confound it!" he declared; "my bones ache so, I cannot move about."

Bylitsa remarked that this was only because he was not yet accustomed to, and that it would soon pass off.

"Of course it will pass off: I know that.—Hanka, will you bring me my dinner?"

"I will, I will: why should you come hither so far?"

He then started at once, the work being due to begin with the day.

Many a day of hard and weary toil followed.

Whether the frost baked the ground at the height of its fierceness, or the gusts and snow-charged gales were blowing, or a thaw came, and they were forced to stand the livelong day in the melting slush, while the bleak damp cold entered their very marrow, or the snow fell so that Antek could hardly see his ax—they had to work all day long till every vein and sinew of the body ached with weariness: the four saws devoured the timber so fast that the men were hardly equal to supplying them; and Matthew was driving them on besides.

But what exasperated him was not the work; for, as wise men say, "Whatever you take to well, can give comfort even in hell." No: what he could not bear was Matthew's position of superiority, and his continual sneers.

The others had got used to these; but he could not help boiling with indignation each time; and more than once he uttered so fierce a snarl that the overseer's eyes flamed. And then, of set purpose, he would begin to criticize everything about Antek: not openly to his face, but always animadverting on anything imperfect in his work, till the latter tingled all over and felt his fists clench of themselves. He nevertheless restrained himself, damped his fires, and simply put all these things by for future remembrance, being well aware that Matthew only awaited an opportunity to oust him from his place.

Now, though Antek cared little for his work in itself, he was resolved not to be put down and triumphed over by any man alive.

And the outcome of all this was that their mutual hatred grew deadlier every day: Yagna, like a festering wound, being at the bottom thereof. Ever since last spring, possibly since last Carnival, both had alternately followed her, each trying to get the better of the other, secretly indeed, yet well aware of the other's attempts. Matthew, however, worked in the open, telling everyone of his love, while Antek was compelled to hide his feelings, and let a dull, yet burning jealousy devour his heart.

There never had been much love lost between them, and they had always looked somewhat askance at each other, and would boast great things in the presence of third parties, each holding himself to be the strongest fellow in the whole village. And now that this mutual hate had grown to such an extent in a few weeks, it had come to pass that neither would address the other; they passed by, glaring like angry wolves.

Matthew was not a bad fellow, nor even of churlish disposition. On the contrary, he had a good heart, and an open helping hand. His only defects were too much self-confidence, and a tendency to set himself above others, together with a belief in his irresistibility with the other sex. No girl, he thought, but must give way to him; and he said so, and bragged of it, and was the first of men in his own con-



ceit. He now also enjoyed telling folk that Antek worked under his orders, and looked up to him humbly lest he should be expelled.

For those that knew the latter, it was surprising to mark how he kept himself calm, and stooped to behave so humbly as he did. But there were those who said there was something brewing under all this; that Antek had never yet overlooked an insult, and would one of these days take his revenge. These were even ready to bet that Matthew would soon find out that he was (as they say) biting at a very sour apple.

Antek, of course, who never looked in anywhere, was ignorant of all that was said. He used to pass by without speaking even to his acquaintances, always going straight home after working-hours. But he, too, felt that there was something about to happen, and he saw plainly through Matthew's doings.

"But I'll beat you into such a jelly, you carrion, that the very dogs will have none of you, and you'll never brag any more!" Such was the cry that escaped him one day at work. Bartek heard and said:

"Take no thought of him; he is paid to drive us, and he does." The old man had not caught the meaning of that cry.

"I cannot brook even a dog that barks without cause!"

"You take it all too much to heart; it heats your liver, and makes you, as I see, toil too feverishly."

"No, I work like that on account of the cold," he answered, wishing to make some reply or other.

"Let us do all things slowly, step by step. Slowly; for the Lord Jesus, who might have made the world in one day only, chose to do so in a whole week, with one day of rest. Why should you be so anxious to wear yourself out for the miller or anyone else's sake? Who forces you?—Matthew is a watch-dog, nothing more: why take his barking amiss?"

"I spoke as I felt," Antek said; and then, to change the conversation, "Where were you last summer?" he asked. "I did not see you in the village."

"I worked a little, saw something of this God's world,



looked about me, and filled my soul with spiritual food," he answered deliberately, whilst hewing the other side of Antek's log, now and then straightening himself, and stretching his limbs till the joints cracked: always pipe in mouth.

"I was working with Matthew at the new Manor; but he drove too hard, and it was springtime in the land, and the sunshine smelt sweet. So I left him. There were folk going that way down to Kalvarya;<sup>1</sup> so I went with them to gain the indulgences and see a bit of the country."

"Is it far to Kalvarya?"

"'Tis beyond Cracow.—But I did not get so far. In a village where we stopped to dine, there was a peasant building a hut, and he knew as much about building as a goat knows about pepper! He made me angry; I swore at the man, for he was wasting good timber—and in the end I stayed on with him. In a couple of months I had built him a house like a villa; and for that he would perforce have me wed his sister, a widow that had five acres of land hard by."

"Old, I dare say."

"Not young, 'tis true; but still comely enough. Rather bald, to be sure; lame, too, with a cast in her eye; and smooth of face to look upon, as a loaf nibbled by mice for a fortnight. But a pleasant woman, and a kind one; gave me lots of good things to eat—now scrambled eggs with bits of sausage, now vodka and lard, now other dainties. And she took to me so that I might have shared her cot any day, had I cared."

"Why did you not? Five acres are always worth having."

"Oh, I had no mind for any woman. Of petticoats I have long had more than enough. They are always crying out and screaming, like magpies in a hedge: you say one word, and they bang a score at your head, like a handful of peas. You have your reason to go by; they have only their

<sup>1</sup> A town close to which stands a monastery on a high hill, with the stations of the Way of the Cross, made in imitation of those in Jerusalem. After Chenstohova, this is the greatest place of pilgrimage in Poland.—*Translator's Note.*

tongues. You talk to them, thinking to be understood: and they neither understand nor heed you, but jabber foolishness only.—They say our Lord created woman with only half a soul. It must be so—and the devil has supplied them with the other half.”

“Perhaps,” Antek put in sadly, “some women may be intelligent.”

“Some crows may be white, but none has ever seen any.”

“Tell me: were you ever married?”

“I was! Oh, yes, I was!” He stopped short, straightened himself, and his grey eyes looked far, far away. He was an old man, dry as a wood-shaving, but sinewy: and straight too, save when at times he drooped, and the pipe wobbled about in his mouth, and his eyes, as now, blinked with quick flutterings.

“Time for the next log!” cried the man at the saws.

“Hurry now, Bartek! Don’t dawdle there! The saws are stopping!” shouted Matthew.

“He’s a fool—wants things done quicker than possible.

“‘There comes a rook to church;  
‘A priest am I!’ he screeches,  
And croaks from pulpit-perch,  
And fondly thinks he preaches,’”

Bartek grumbled, as in anger; but some other emotion had taken hold of him, and his rests were more frequent, and he sighed at times, looking southward for noon.

Luckily it came then: the women were there, with the dinners in the pots they carried. Hanka appeared from behind the mill. The saws ceased their rasping, and they all went to eat in the building, Antek, who knew the miller’s man, going to his room. At present he did not avoid folk, nor turn away from them, but would look them in the face with eyes that made them turn their own away.

In a room too hot almost to breathe in, there sat several persons in sheepskins, talking joyously. These were people from villages at some distance, who had brought corn that was to be ground while they waited. They had crammed



with peat the little stove that was already red-hot, and were smoking cigarettes and chatting, so that the whole room was as dim as it was hot.

Antek seated himself on a sack near the window and, with the pot between his knees, he fell to with great zest, first upon the dish of cabbage with peas, and then upon another, made of potatoes mashed with milk. Hanka, crouching on the floor by his side, looked tenderly on him. Hard work had made him thinner, and in places the skin had peeled off his face: yet to her he seemed the handsomest man on earth. Yes, just as he was: tall, straight-limbed, lithe; slender-waisted, broad-shouldered, supple; his face a long thin oval, his nose like a hawk's beak, but only slightly curved; his eyes full, a greyish green, under eyebrows that seemed drawn with charcoal from temple to temple in one straight line, and were terrible to behold when he knit them in angry mood; his forehead lofty, but half covered with hair that fell over it, straight down, like a mane, dark almost to blackness; and that upper lip of his, clean-shaven after the peasants' fashion, disclosing a row of white teeth within crimson borders, like a string of ivory beads! Oh, she was never tired of gazing upon him!

"Could not your father bring the dinner? You have to go so far every day!"

"He had to remove the dung from our heifer's stall; and besides, I preferred to come myself."

And she always managed to do so, for the mere sake of gazing at his comely form.

"Any news?" he asked, as his dinner came to an end.

"Nothing much. I have spun one sack of wool, and taken the yarn—five hanks of it—to the organist's wife. She was very much pleased.—Our little Peter is not well: he won't eat and is hot and feverish."

"He has only overeaten himself."

"Surely, surely.—Oh, and Yankel came to buy our geese."

"Will you sell them?"

"A likely thing, indeed! To buy others when spring comes round?"



"Do as you choose. I leave all that to you."

"And at the Vahniks' there has been a fight again, and his Reverence has been sent for to reconcile them.—And they say that the calf at the Paches' has choked itself with eating carrots."

"That's all one to me," he growled impatiently.

"—And the organist came collecting sheaves," she said after a while, with a tremble in her voice.

"What did you give?"

"Two handfuls of carded flax, and four eggs.—And he said that, if we wished, he would let us have a wagonful of oat-straw, and wait till summer for payment. But I did not accept: why should we take aught from him? And moreover, we have a right to your father's pasturage. We had only two cartloads—far too few for so many acres . . ."

"I will not remind him of it, and I forbid you to do so. For the spinning you do, take the oat-straw from the organist. If you will not, then sell all our live-stock. So long as I live, never will I ask my father for anything whatsoever.—Do you understand?"

"I do, and shall apply to the organist."

"Your work, together with mine, will perhaps suffice.—Hanka, no weeping here: they see us!"

"I am not weeping.—Antek, pray ask the miller for half a hectolitre of barley to grind: if we bought it ready ground, it would cost more."

"Good. I will tell him to-day, and stay on here one of these evenings to see it ground."

Hanka left him, and he remained, smoking cigarettes in silence. They were just then talking of the Squire of Vola, and of his brother.

"His name is Yacek: I knew him well!" Bartek exclaimed, coming into the room.

"Then of course you know he has returned from foreign parts."

"No, indeed. I thought he had died long ago."

"He is here; arrived a fortnight back."

"Yes, he has come, but—so folk say—not quite in his

right mind. He refuses to live at the Manor, and has gone to dwell in the pine-forest, where he does everything for himself—cooking, sewing, and all. Everyone wonders at him. In the evening he plays on his violin: they often and often meet him on the roads near certain graves, where he sits and plays tunes."

"I was told he goes from hamlet to hamlet, asking people for news of one Kuba."

"Kuba?—Many a dog is named Tray!"

"He gives no surname, but seeks the man Kuba, who carried him off a battle-field, it seems, and saved his life once."

"There was a Kuba at our farm who went out with the nobles in the last insurrection; but he's dead," Antek observed, rising to his feet; for Matthew was already shouting outside:

"Come out, you: are ye to make dinner last till tea-time?"

Antek, much ruffled, rushed out, and cried:

"Do not spend breath in vain, we all can hear you!"

"He is too full of meat, and eases his belly with shouting!" was Bartek's remark; and someone added:

"The noise he makes is but to curry favour with the miller."

Matthew went on grumbling: "They must dine and enjoy long chats at their ease,—must they not?—these grand fellows, these big farmers, who haven't one whole pair of breeches!"

"Take that, Antek; that's for you!"

"Hold your peace, and let not your tongue clack so, or I'll cut it out for you!" Antek had raised his voice, ready now for anything. "And never a word more about farmers!"

Matthew darted a murderous look at him, but replied nothing. For the whole day, he mutely watched Antek's work with the most rigid scrutiny, but without finding anything against him. He worked so admirably well that the miller himself, who came round several times a day to look over the work done, could not find any fault with it, and



at the first weekly payment raised his wages to three *zloty*.

At this Matthew, in a towering passion, had words with the miller, who answered: "I am satisfied both with him and with you, and with every man who works well."

"You have raised his wages merely to spite me!"

"I have done so as in justice bound, and want all men to know I am just. Why, he is worth as much as Bartek, if not more."

"Then," Matthew threatened, "I throw the whole damned business up. You may do the work yourself!"

"Do so, if you choose. If my black bread is not to your taste, go seek rolls elsewhere. Young Boryna will take your place, and that at four *zloty* daily," the miller said, with a laugh.

Matthew cooled down immediately, seeing that bullying was out of the question. He gave up his persecutions, put his dislike for Antek deep into his pocket (though there it burned like a live coal), and also became less exacting, less of a taskmaster for the men. This they were not slow to perceive, and Bartek presently remarked to the others:

"He's like the dog that snapped at a man's boot, got kicked on the muzzle, and fawned on him. Aye, he thought he was the favourite, and knows now he will have to go as soon as a better man is found."

Both to the rise in wages, and to Matthew's knuckling down, Antek was indifferent; he cared for all that as much as for the year gone by. It was not for the money's sake, but to please Hanka, and for his own satisfaction, that he was working. Had he made up his mind to lie on his back all day long, he would have done so, no matter what came of it.

Thus day after day, week after week slipped by, till Yuletide, in hard incessant labour. Little by little, his mind grew calmer—frozen up, as it were: so far was he from resembling the man he had been. Folk marvelled at this, and judged him diversely. But the change in him was only external and for the eyes of men: within he remained as he was before. He worked now, and toiled hard, gave his



wife every *groschen* he earned, stayed at home of evenings, was kinder than ever, silent, peaceful; played with his children, helped his wife at home, nor ever said a cross word to anyone. But all this did not avail to hoodwink Hanka. His transformation pleased her, indeed, and she fervently thanked God for it, watching over him, attentive to the looks in his eyes to find out what he desired—the most attached and thoughtful of servants. But she would often note a mournful gleam in his eye, and overhear a low sigh that escaped him. Then her arms dropped to her sides, and her heart died within her as she sought in her mind, thinking whence the evil that was to come would proceed. Well did she know that something terrible was fermenting within him—something that he repressed only by putting forth his whole strength—something that crouched secretly, sucking, sucking the life-blood of his soul!

But whatever he felt, good or evil, he said nothing. After his work he returned straight home, choosing the longer way by the other side of the pond, that he might not pass near his father's home, not meet with . . . someone.

*Someone!*

Therefore, too, he stayed at home on Sundays, although Hanka besought him to come to church with her. He feared a meeting with Yagna; he felt that he should not stand it, that he never could resist.

Besides, he had heard from Bartek, with whom he was not on unfriendly terms, how the village folk were always busied about him; how they watched and spied upon him at every step, as on a thief. And he had himself more than once seen eyes that peeped at him round corners, with swift peering glances,—glances which would have loved to penetrate his very soul, to search all that was therein, and explore it through and through.

"The wretches! But they shall get nothing out of me, nothing!" he would say bitterly, all the more stubborn in his hate because he kept more aloof from everyone.

"I need no one; I am on such terms with myself that I can scarcely bear my own companionship," he would reply

to Klemba, when the latter reproached him for never coming to see them.

This was true, most true; he could hardly bear to live on thus, continually holding himself down with all his might, breaking his soul in as with an iron curb, and keeping it under the strictest control. But he felt himself giving way with sheer weariness of the struggle; ever more and more frequently there came over him the longing to throw everything up and yield to his fate—happy or miserable, it mattered little to him. He was disgusted with life, and devoured with sadness—infinite sadness, which, like a bird of prey, had sunk its talons deep into his mangled heart.

To bear the yoke thus was irksome beyond words: he choked and strained in bonds, as a horse tethered in a paddock, or as a chained-up dog might do.

He thought of himself as a fruit-tree, broken by the gales, condemned to die, withering slowly in the midst of a blossoming orchard full of lusty life.

And Lipka—Lipka went on as usual. There were christenings, as at the Vahniks'; betrothals, as at the Klembas' (though now they had no music, they took as much enjoyment as was allowed in Advent); then in some families there was a death, as at that other Bartek's, whom his son-in-law had beaten so fearfully that he pined away and lay moaning until at last refreshed in Abraham's bosom. And Yagustynka had once again brought another action against her children for breach of contract. Many another thing was going on besides, something new in nearly every hut, and folk had plenty of matter for gossip, and for laughter and for sorrow. And throughout the long winter evenings, the women gathered together and spun in many a cabin. And, Lord! how they all did laugh and chatter and wrangle, till the noise of their jollity was heard far out on the road! Everywhere there was no end of squabbling, of striking up friendships, of wooings, of trysts outside the homesteads; of turmoils and fightings and sweet converse: as in an ant-hill or in a beehive, so the folk swarmed and buzzed within their cabins.



Yes, everyone lived as he pleased, as seemed best to him and was fitter both to himself and his neighbours, and according to the commandments of God.

And he, Antek, stood alone, outside of them all, cut off from humanity; like a strange bird, hungry, yet afraid, that will perhaps flap its wings outside the lighted windows, and long to draw nearer to the corn-filled stacks—and yet does not: only wheels around, listens, feeds on its hunger, gulps down its thirst, and never will draw nigh!

Unless—unless God should deign to work in him a change that might last for ever, and make him a new creature!

Alas! of such a change he dreaded as yet even to think.

One morning, only a few days before Christmas, he met the blacksmith; who, though Antek would have passed him by, blocked the way and, stretching out his hand, said to him kindly and in a slightly sad tone:

"And I expected you'd come to me as to a brother. I could have talked with you and aided you, little as we have at home."

"Why did you not come first?"

"What? intrude and be driven away like Yuzka?"

"You were right. 'He that suffereth naught will for nothing take thought.'"

"'Suffereth naught!' Is not my grievance the very same as yours?"

"How dare you tell me such a bare-faced lie? Am I a witling in your eyes?"

"As I love the Lord God, I have spoken naught but the truth."

"The fox, it is a cunning beast:

'Twill run and sniff and turn and twist,

And with its tail

It sweeps its trail,

That none may nose the scent of it,"

said Antek, with contempt.

"Your grievance is, I know, that I went to the wedding. It is true that I did not refuse. But how could I? The



priest himself urged and pressed me not to offend God, making division between the children and their father."

"Ah, ye went at the priest's bidding, did ye? Tell that to him that will believe you, not to me.—Oh, but ye wring out of the old man all ye can wring, as the price of your friendship: he does not send you away empty-handed!"

"'Who takes not what is offered him's an ass,'" the blacksmith quoted. "But I'll not argue that with you. All Lipka will tell you—why, you may ask Yagustynka, who is always with the old man—that I press him to make it up with you. It will come about . . . he will calm down . . . and we shall arrange matters."

"Try to reconcile dogs, not him and me: do you hear? I never thought of quarrelling with you; but now, let me alone, you and your reconciliations!—Look at him! A fine friend indeed! Never would you reconcile us, unless to get the last coat off my back!—Once for all, I tell you: let me alone, and do not come in my way; for if I ever fall into a passion, I'll tear your red hair off your scalp, and play the devil with your ribs: aye, and your good friends, the gendarmes, will not prevent me. Just remember that."

He turned on his heel and went off, not even looking round at the smith, who stood with mouth wide open in the middle of the road.

"The rotten liar!—Hand in glove with the old man, to come and talk to me of friendship! He that would make beggars of both of us, if he could!"

It took him some time to cool down after this meeting; especially as everything that morning went wrong with him. He had scarcely begun chopping the logs, when a knot made a notch in his ax; then, just before noon, a piece of timber crashed upon his foot, and only failed to crush it by a rare good chance: he had to pull his boot off and cool his swollen foot with ice. Matthew was, moreover, in bad humour that day, finding fault with everybody: this was badly done, that done too slowly; and, as for Antek, he took every pretext to grumble at him.

Everything went wrong; even the barley that Franek was

to have ground, and about which Hanka was always troubling, had not been done yet, the excuse being press of work.

At home, too, things were not quite right. Hanka was distressed and tearful, for little Peter lay sick of a burning fever, and she had been forced to call in Yagustynka to fumigate him.

She came just at supper-time, sat by the fire, looked furtively about her, and would have liked to gossip very much, but that they received her attempts very coldly; and so she presently set to trying her healing powers on the boy.

"I am off to the mill," Antek said, taking his cap; "unless I see the barley ground myself, it never will be done."

"Could not Father go in your stead?"

"I shall be far more likely to get it."—He went off in a hurry, ill-humoured, out of sorts, tossed about like a solitary tree in a storm. Besides, everything at home enraged him—especially those prying ferret eyes of Yagustynka.

The evening was still and not frosty, with but few stars to be seen—only one or two, twinkling far away as through a veil. The wind blew from the woods, with a dull humming murmur, betokening a change of weather. Dogs barked dispersedly about the hamlet, smoke trailed along the road, and the air, though bleak, was damp.

Christmas being at hand, there were plenty of people at the mill. Those whose corn was being ground waited in the passage; the others stayed in the room of the miller's man. These formed a circle round Matthew, who was telling them something very funny, at which they every now and then burst into laughter. Antek did not care to cross the threshold, and went out to look for Franek at the mill.

"He is on the dam," they said, "squabbling with Magda—you know—the wench the organist turned out."

"The miller," another peasant told him, "has threatened to send him away, if he is ever again seen in the mill with Magda; for she used to spend her nights there. But, poor thing! where else has she to go?"

And someone else added, jestingly: "'What in March we pursue, in November we rue!'"



Antek sat down to wait, close to the place where the finest flour was ground, and opposite to the half-open door of the waiting-room. There he could discern Matthew's shoulders, and the heads of the others all turned towards him and intent on what he was telling them. But for the clatter of the wheels, he could have even made out what was said, though he had no curiosity that way.

He threw himself on to some sacks of corn, and presently, out of sheer dejection and weariness, began to doze.

The mill clattered away, flapping, throbbing, and in full activity in every one of its compartments; the wheels beat as if a hundred washerwomen were all using their bats with might and main; the water swirled past them with a bubbling hullabaloo and, churned up into boiling foam and snowy flakes, rushed on to the river.

For hard upon an hour, Antek stayed there, expectant, but at last made for the yard to go and seek Franek and also to rouse himself up somewhat, feeling overcome with slumber. The way out led through the waiting-room, which he was just going to enter, and his hand was upon the latch, when what he heard Matthew saying made him stop on a sudden.

"Yes, the old fellow boils the milk and tea, and takes it to her in bed! They say that he, along with Yagustynka, does all the kine want done for them, and will not let her soil her hands; nay, that he has bought something for her in town, lest she catch cold by going out behind the barn!"

Here followed a burst of loud laughter, and then a hail-storm of jests. Antek, by an instinctive movement, returned to where he had sat before and, flinging himself again upon the sacks, gazed vacantly at the streak of ruddy light that came from the door which stood ajar. Now he could hear no more, for the din made the talk inaudible; a grey mist of flour-dust rose and dimmed everything round him; the lamps, which hung by cords from the ceiling, twinkled through the white fog, and glowed athwart it, as yellow as cats' eyes, and vibrated continually. But he was too rest-



less to stay seated; again he rose, and quietly and on tiptoe approached the door, and bent his ear.

"... She explained everything!" Matthew said. "Dominikova assured him that the girl had been in a hurry, scrambling over a fence... it was a thing that very frequently happened... had occurred to herself when a maiden. A most convenient explanation! And he believed her, the old ram! Such a clever man! and he believed her."

The laughter became a hurricane; they all were in paroxysms, and made the house ring again.

Nearer and nearer crept Antek, now almost on the very threshold, pale as a corpse, with fists clenched, crouching and gathered together for a spring.

When they had done, Matthew continued: "But as to what they say of Antek's being on too friendly terms with Yagna, I happen to know that to be false. I myself heard him whining like a dog outside her bedroom door, till she drove him out with a besom! He stuck to her like a burr to a dog's tail, but she got rid of him for all that."

Someone here inquired: "Did you see that? In the village they talk otherwise."

"Did I see?—Why, I was in there with her, and she herself complained how he teased her!"

"You lying cur!" Antek shrieked, as he darted past the threshold.

Matthew instantly sprang at him. But, swift as thought, Antek was upon him with the leap of a wolf. One hand clutching at his throat, stopping both breath and voice, the other grasping his belt, he whirled him up in the air like a bush you root out, burst open the door with a kick, and rushed with him beyond the sawmill to the river-fence, against which he hurled him with such fury that four rails broke like reeds, and Matthew fell into the stream like a log!

A great tumult and clamour ensued, for in that spot the river was deep and swift. They hastened to the rescue and got him out at once, but he was insensible. The miller

came running in directly and sent for Ambrose, who came in at once. The people from the village assembled in crowds, till Matthew was conveyed into the miller's house; he swooned again and again, and spat much blood. And as they feared he could not live through the night, the priest was sent for.

Antek, as soon as Matthew had been carried out, coolly took his place by the fireside, chatting with Franek, who had turned up; and when the folk were back in the room again, and things a little more quiet, Antek spoke out, so loud that all could hear him:

"If anyone shall a second time bait and mock me, I will do the like to him, yea, and more also!"

No one answered a word. They only gazed upon him in profound wonder and respect. How had it been possible to lay hold on such a man as Matthew, lift him up as easily as a bundle of straw, carry him out and hurl him into the river? So stupendous a feat had never yet been heard of. They might have fought together, wrestled, and one in the end have overcome the other, with breaking of bones even, or the crushing out of life: that was quite a usual thing. But no: he had taken the man, just as you take a puppy by the ears, and thrown him into the river! That the rails had broken his ribs, that was nothing; he might get well. But the shame of it, the shame, was what Matthew would never be able to bear: he was disgraced for all his life.

"Really, really, my dear fellow," one man repeated to another, "never yet has such a thing been!"

Heedless of their talk, Antek got his meal ground and went home about midnight. He saw the lighted window of the room at the miller's where they had taken Matthew.

"Foul dog!" he said as he glanced that way, and spat on the ground in hatred, "ye never will boast again of having been with Yagna in her bedchamber!"

Hanka had not yet gone to bed, and was spinning when he came in; but he told her nothing. In the morning he stopped away from work, feeling sure they had turned him

away. But he had scarcely breakfasted when the miller came in.

"Come and work. Your quarrel with Matthew is your own business: I have naught to do with it. But the saw-mill must go on working as before, till he is well.—You will now be overseer, and have four *zloty* a day and dinner."

"I do not accept. Give me what you gave Matthew, then I will: and do his work as well as he."

The miller flew in a rage, and wanted to bargain, but he was obliged to give in: what else could he do? He took him on at once, and walked away.

Hanka, who had been told nothing of what had occurred, was much puzzled at all this.



## CHAPTER IV

SINCE daybreak on Christmas Eve, the whole village was in a state of feverish excitement and bustling activity.

It had again frozen during the night, and as the frost came after a couple of mild days and damp fogs, the trees were all covered over with a moss-like growth of glassy crystals. The sun had come out of the clouds, and shone in a clear blue sky, with only the thinnest and most transparent veil of haze; but it shone palely, coldly, like the Host in the Monstrance, warming nothing. The frost had grown harder as the day advanced, and of such severity and penetration that it almost took the breath away, and raised a cloud of condensed vapour round every living being. Yet the world was steeped in bright sunshine, and radiant with glittering splendour; on every side the sparkling snow seemed oversprinkled with a dew of diamond-like scintillation. The surrounding fields, buried under their white pall, lay refulgent, but dead. Now and then a bird passed, flapping over their pure expanse, while its black shadow glided along the ground below; or a covey of partridges clucked amongst the snow-laden bushes, with timorous watchfulness and stealth, drawing near to the dwellings of men and their cornstacks crammed with grain. Elsewhere a hare would show its dark form, leaping through the drifts, or standing on its hind legs, or gnawing to get at the garnered corn, but—alarmed by the barking of the dogs,—scamper back to the great forest, where every tree was tufted with hoar-frost.

A keen piercing cold, luminous with glacial sheen, now shimmered over the whole world, and plunged it in ice-bound stillness.

Not a single cry broke the hard silence of the countryside, no living voice resounded, no breath of wind whispered amongst those glistening arid fields of snow. Only at rare intervals, from the roads half buried in the drifts, did faint-voiced bells and the stridulous creaking of a sledge strike the ear, so feeble and so far off that they were all but inaudible, and no one could tell whence it came or whither it went, ere the sound again faded into utter silence.

But all along the Lipka roads, on either side of the pond, the folk were noisy and swarming. The air itself wafted something of festive joy, and the people, nay, even the cattle, were full of the same. Through the frozen air that carried sound so well, there floated cries like musical tunes; laughter out of many a merry throat echoed from one end of the hamlet to the other, awakening like gaiety of heart; dogs rolled madly about on the snow, and bayed with glee, and pursued the crows that hung about the cabins; horses whinnied in unseen stalls; and cows in their byres bellowed tunefully. One might almost fancy that the snow crackled more crisply and briskly underfoot, while the sledge-runners sounded sharp along the hardened and glass-smooth roads, and the smoke went up in blue pillars straight as arrows, and the cabin-windows winked in the sun till they fairly dazzled you. Noisy children were all about, and the hum of talk was heard, and the cackling of geese that swam about in the holes made in the ice; and people were calling, calling to one another. On the roads, round about the homesteads and their belongings, folk were passing everywhere; and through the snow-whitened orchards gleamed the red petticoats of women going from hut to hut and, as they went and grazed the trees or shrubs, receiving a shower of silvery dust.

On this day, even the mill did not clatter. Indeed, it was silent during the whole festival; but a pellucid ice-cold stream, led out by the sluices, ran with babbling melody; and beyond this, somewhere far away, the cries of a flock of wild ducks, wheeling in the air, arose from marshes and moors.

Every cabin—Machek's, Simon's, the Voyt's, and who can



say how many more?—was now being aired and scoured and scrubbed, and the rooms, the passages, and even the snow in front of the huts, were strewn with fresh pine-needles; in some dwellings the hearths, grown black and dingy, had also been whitewashed. In all the huts they were busy making bread, especially the *strucle*, or wheaten bread, with poppy-seed-sprinkled crust; and this seed was also being pounded in mortars for other much-liked dainties.

Yes, Yule-tide was at hand: the feast of the Divine Child, the joyful day of wondrous goodwill to men; the blessed respite from the long never-ending round of labour, to arouse the souls of men from their wintry torpor, and shake off the grey dullness of everyday life, and make them go forward joyfully and with a glad thrill of the heart, to meet the day of our Lord's Nativity.

At Boryna's, too, the same activity, and quick going to and fro, and bustling preparation, prevailed as elsewhere.

Boryna himself had been in town since the morning, to make purchases. Pete, a man whom he had taken as groom after Kuba's death, accompanied him.

They all were very busy inside the cabin. Yuzka, humming a tune, was cutting out of coloured paper some of those curious figures which they stick for decoration either on the beams or on the picture-frames, making them look as if painted in brilliant colours. Yagna, her sleeves turned up almost to her shoulders, was kneading in the trough with her mother's aid; now preparing the long *strucle*, and loaves of the finest flour (she was hurrying, for the dough had already risen, and she had to fashion the loaves instantly); now casting an eye on Yuzka's work; now seeing to the honey-and-cheese-cakes, that were rising under warm coverings, and awaiting their turn for the baking-oven; and now flying round to where the fire roared up the chimney.

Vitek had been ordered to see to the fire and keep it well fed with logs; but they had seen him only at breakfast: afterwards, where was he?—Both Yagna and Dominikova looked for him about the premises, and called him, but in vain; he never answered. The naughty lad was away be-



yond the haystack, out in the fields, under the bushes where he was setting snares to catch partridges, and covering these over with thick layers of chaff, both to conceal them, and as a bait. Lapa accompanied him, and also Bociek, the stork that he had taken care of, and healed, and fed, and taught a number of tricks, and made such a friend of that he had only to whistle in a peculiar manner for it to come to him as obediently as Lapa—with whom, besides, it got on in perfect harmony, and they used to hunt rats together in the stable.

Roch, whom Boryna had taken to his home for the holidays, had been and was still in church, where, in company with Ambrose, he had spent the morning decorating the altar and the walls with pine-branches that the priest's servant brought to them.

It was near noon when Yagna had finished kneading all the loaves, and was now placing them on a board, patting them into shape, and daubing them over with white of egg, lest they should crack in the oven. Just then Vitek came in, crying out: "They are bringing us the Kolendy!"

Since early dawn, Yanek, the organist's eldest son—the one who was at school—had been taking altar-breads round, in company with his younger brother.

When they came in, and said: "Praised be Jesus Christ!" Yagna turned and saw them.

She was greatly confused at the room being in such disorder and, hiding her bare arms beneath her apron, asked them to sit down and rest, as they had heavy baskets, and the younger one bore several packages besides.

They said they could not. "We have still to go over half the village, and but little time for that."

"At least stay awhile, Mr. Yanek, and warm yourself: it is so bitterly cold!"

"And," Dominikova proposed, "perhaps you will both take a little hot milk."

They made excuses, but at last rested themselves close to the window. Yanek was unable to take his eyes off Yagna, till she hurriedly pulled her sleeves down over her arms:

at which he turned crimson like a beet-root, and fumbled in his basket for the altar-breads. He took out the finest and largest packet, in a gilt paper wrapper, and containing several coloured wafers, also shaped like altar-breads. Yagna, holding her hands under her apron, took the packet, laid it on a plate beneath the crucifix, and then brought him a good gallon measure of linseed, and six eggs.

"Have you been back here long, Mr. Yanek?"

"Only three days: since Sunday."

"Is not that book-learning a very tedious thing?" Dominkova inquired.

"Not very; but then it is only to last till spring."

"Your mother told me—I remember 'twas on my wedding-day—you were going to prepare for the priesthood."

"Yes, I—I am.—After Eastertide," he answered, in a low tone and with downcast eyes.

"Lord, what a consolation that will be to your parents! To have a priest in the family! And what an honour to the parish!"

"Have you any news?"

"None; and that is good news. Everything goes on quietly with us, as is usual amongst farmers."

"Yagna, I should willingly have come over for your wedding, but they would not let me."

"Oh," Yuzka exclaimed, "what a merry-making that was! Why, there was dancing for three days running!"

"Kuba died then, I am told."

"Yes, he did, poor wretch! Lost so much blood, he passed away before the priest came to shrive him. They say in the village that his soul is doing penance—that there is now some creature wandering about and groaning by night along the ways and where four roads meet, and hard by crosses, waiting for God to have mercy on it. It must be Kuba's soul: whose else?"

"What is this you say?"

"Naught but the truth. I myself have seen nothing, and so cannot swear to it. But there may be things in the world that man's mind is unable to see through, no matter



how keen. For these are the works of God, not of man."

"I am sorry Kuba died. The priest himself wept when he told me."

"A most upright servant he was: quiet, religious, hard-working, never taking what was not his, and always ready to share his last garment with a poor man."

"Continual changes in Lipka. Every time I come back here, I find things quite altered.—I was at Antek's to-day. His children are ill, misery is knocking at their door, and he himself is so changed, so thin, I hardly knew him."

To these words there was no answer. Yagna quickly turned her face away, and set about putting the loaves on the shovel, whilst her mother darted him such a glance that he felt he had touched on an unpleasant subject. With a wish to mend matters, he was seeking to start another, when Yuzka addressed him with a blush, and asked for some of his coloured wafers.

"I want them for the 'globes' we hang up. We had some from last year, but they were quite spoiled in the racket of the wedding-feast."

Certainly he would; and he gave her more than a dozen, of five different tints.

"So many! O Lord! I shall have enough to make not only 'globes,' but 'moons' too, and 'stars'!" she cried in great glee. Yagna whispered to her, and she came, blushing, her apron over her face, to offer him six more eggs in return for his gift.

Boryna had meanwhile returned, and came in, Lapa and Bociak following him, along with Vitek.

"Shut the door this instant," cried Dominikova, "or the cakes will get cold!"

"When women set to putting things in order," Boryna said jocosely, as he warmed his freezing hands, "men must seek lodgings, even at the tavern. The road was like glass, the sledge ran splendidly, but it was so cold we were nearly frozen in our seats.—Yagna, give Pete something to eat. He has been nigh freezing to the marrow in his soldier's greatcoat.—Tell me, Yanek, are you home for long?"



"Till Twelfth Night."

"You must be a great help to your father, both at the organ and in his office. It is so cold, he can hardly wish to leave his warm bed, now that he is getting on in years!"

"But that's not why he did not come to you himself: our cow has calved to-day, and he is forced to stay and tend her."

"That's good for you: you will have milk all the winter through."

"How now, Vitek, have you watered the colt?"

"I have myself," said Yagna, "but it would not drink at all, only frisked about; and it teased the mare so, I had to take it away to the biggest stall."

Yanek and his brother took their leave, but the former had his eyes fixed on Yagna to the very last: he saw she was still more lovely than in autumn, when yet unmarried.

It was therefore no wonder that she had so completely overcome her old husband, who could see nothing in the world but her. They said truly in the village that his love had made a dotard of him. Hard and unyielding as he was to everyone else, Yagna could do with him whatever she pleased; he obeyed her in everything, saw things only through her eyes, and took her advice, and her mother's too. Nor had he any reason to regret the results. His farm was in good order, everything prospered, he had every comfort, someone to complain to and talk things over with; and his only care in the world was now Yagna, to whom he cast up his eyes as to some holy image.

Even now, whilst warming himself by the fire, he looked lovingly in her direction, and had ready, just as before the wedding, sweet affectionate words for her; all his thoughts were to give her pleasure.

Yagna, indeed, cared as much for his love as for last year's snow. Just now she was moody, and out of patience with his transports of tenderness. Everything harried her, and she went about, angry and cold as a February wind, throwing work on her mother, or on Yuzka, and spurring her husband himself to exertions by some sharp word: she

herself went to the other lodgings, she said, to see about the stove, and to the stable to tend the colt; but, in reality, to be alone and think of Antek.

For Yanek had reminded her of him, and now Antek was as present to her mind's eye as if he were there before her in the flesh. During hard upon three months she had seen nothing of him—except that once, when she was driving out along the Poplar-road. Yes, time had flowed by like a river: the wedding, the home-coming, her various occupations and the cares of her household duties, had left her no time to think of him. Out of sight, out of mind; and her acquaintances had avoided all mention of his name. And now, she knew not why, he had surged up suddenly before her with so sad and reproachful a look that her very soul within her was shaken and distressed.—“I have done no harm to you,” she said within herself; “why, then, are you haunting me thus, like a spectre, like a ghost?” And she attempted to wrestle with her memories of the past. She marvelled why his figure alone came back to her so—not Matthew's, not Staho Ploshka's, not any of the others—only his! Had he given her a love-charm that was now putting her beside herself, and tormenting her with the pangs that she felt?

“What is he doing now, poor fellow? what is he thinking of? . . . And there is no means of having speech with him, none!—Certainly, it is a grievous sin.—Dear Jesus! It is a thing forbidden; so the priest told me in confession.—Oh, but if I could only speak to him once more—speak even in presence of a third person!—No, no: never, never, never! . . . I am Boryna's until death!”

“Yagna!” her mother called; “do come: we have to take the loaves out.”

She ran back to the house, hurrying and bustling, and seeking to forget. But in vain: everywhere she saw his eyes, and those black overshadowing brows of his—and those red, red lips . . . how ravenously eager, and how sweet!

She set to work with feverish activity, putting the place in order; and in the evening she went to the byre, a place she



scarcely ever visited. But all would not do. He was always there—there before her.—A great craving arose within her, tearing her heart to shreds; and her soul was so sorely tempest-tossed that she at last came to Yuzka, sedulously at work making “globes,” and, sitting down upon the chest by her side, burst into a passion of tears.

Her mother and her husband were alarmed and sought to calm her; they tried to soothe her as one soothes a spoiled child; they caressed her, they looked lovingly into her eyes: all was of no avail. She cried till she could cry no longer. And then, suddenly, she felt a change and, rising from her seat in a strange humour of merriment, began to talk and laugh, and almost burst into song.

Boryna stared at her in wonder, and so did her mother. Then they exchanged glances full of meaning, and went out to whisper together in the passage. They came back gay and joyful, and embraced and kissed her with the most tender affection.

“Do not lift that kneading-trough!” exclaimed Dominkova earnestly; “you must not. Matthias will do that for you!”

“Why, I have often lifted and carried many a heavier thing!”

She did not understand.

Boryna would not let her touch the trough; he carried it himself. And a little later, when she was in the bedroom, he took the opportunity of taking her in his arms and telling her something that Yuzka was not to hear.

“Both mother’s head and yours are turned! What you suppose is not the case: you are both wrong.”

“These are things that we know something about, and there is no mistake here.—Let me see. It is Yule-tide now. . . . Then—then it will be only in July.—Dear, dear! in harvest-time!—Yet let us thank God that it has come to pass in any case.” He would have embraced her again, but she shrank away from him in a temper, and ran to her mother to protest. The old dame, however, asserted that there was no mistake.



"There is, there is! 'tis naught but your fancy!" Yagna cried in hot denial.

"You are not glad of this, it seems?"

"And why should I be glad? Have we not enough troubles, without this too thrown in?"

"Do not complain, or the Lord will punish you!"

"Let Him, let Him!"

"But what have you to complain of?"

"That I do not wish it: that is all!"

"Look, Yagna: if you have a child, then, in the case of your husband's death (which Heaven forbend!) it would have an equal part with the other children as his heir; and possibly all the land might come to it in the end . . ."

"Land, land, land! Ye think of naught else; and to me it is naught!"

"Because you're as yet a silly child, and your head is full of nonsense. A man without land is like a man without legs: he crawls about and cannot get anywhere.—But, at any rate, say nothing of this to Matthias; it would vex him."

"I shall say whatever I like. What do I care for him?"

"Then do so, if you are such a fool; yes, tell everybody about it!—Go rather, set to work; take the herrings out of the water to soak them in milk; it will make them less salt. And tell Yuzka to pound some more poppy-seed; there is yet much work, and the day is far spent."

So it was. Evening approached, the sun had sunk behind the forest; its setting glow stretched along the sky in blood-red streaks, and all the snows were fiery and as if oversprinkled with live coals. The hamlet had quieted down. Folk were still fetching water from the pond, and chopping firewood; at times sledges went past like a whirlwind, men ran across the pond, gates creaked on their hinges, and voices were heard here and there; but the movement was slowing down as the fires of sunset died out: with the pallid livid hues now overspreading the plain, the quiet also spread, the land sank to rest, and the ways had fewer and fewer passers-by. The far-off fields now lost in murky darkness, the winter evening reigned over the country; the

cold increased, the snow crackled louder underfoot, and all the panes were embellished with frost-patterns and fantastic trceries.

Slowly the village was vanishing in grey snowy shadows, melting away; neither huts nor fences nor orchards could be made out; only a few lights twinkled, more thick than usual, because everyone was busy preparing the meal of Christmas Eve.

In every cabin, from the richest to the very poorest of all, preparations were being zealously made; in each family room, at the corner next the east, they had placed a sheaf of corn; the tables were strewn with hay beneath bleached linen napery; and they looked out eagerly through the windows for the appearance of the first star.

The sky, as is often the case when it freezes, was not very clear when evening began to fall; it had seemed to veil itself as soon as the last glow had burned out, and was hidden in the gloom of many a dusky wreath.

Yuzka and Vitek, terribly chilled, were standing outside the porch, on the watch for the appearance of the first star.

"There it is!" Vitek suddenly exclaimed. "There it is!"

Boryna and the others, and Roch last of them all, came out to see.

Yes, it was there, and just in the east, having pierced through the sombre curtains which hung round about it: it shone forth from the dark-blue depths, and seemed to grow larger as they gazed upon it; gleaming brighter and brighter, nearer and nearer, till Roch knelt down in the snow, and the others after him.

"Lo, 'tis the star of the Three Wise Men," he said; "the Star of Bethlehem, in whose gleaming our Lord was born.—Blessed be His Holy Name!"

These words they piously repeated after him, gazing up with eager eyes at the bright far-off witness of the miraculous Birth—the visible token of God's mercy, visiting the world.

Their hearts throbbed with tender gratitude and glowing faith, while they received and absorbed into their hearts



that pure light, the sacred fire—the sacrament to fight with and to overcome all evil!

And the star, seeming to grow larger still, rose up like a ball of fire, from which beams of azure brightness shot down like the spokes of a mystic wheel, darting its rays upon the snows, and twinkling with radiant victory over darkness. Then after it there came forth other stars, its faithful attendants, peering out in innumerable dense multitudes—filling all the heavens, covering them with a dew of light, and making them, as it were, a mantle of dark azure, strewn with silver motes.

“And now that the Word is made Flesh,” said Roch, “it is time to take our meal.”

They went in, and took seats for supper at a high long bench.

Boryna occupied the first place, then Dominikova and her sons (for they had arranged to eat together); Roch sat in the middle, Pete, Vitek, and Yuzka after him, and Yagna at the very end; for she had to see about the service.

The family room was now in utter and solemn silence.

Boryna, having made the sign of the Cross, divided an altar-bread with each of those present, and all partook of it with reverence, as representing the Bread of Life.

“Christ,” then said Roch, “was born at this hour; therefore let every creature feed upon this holy bread!”

And though they had eaten all day long only a little dry bread, and were very hungry, they all ate slowly and with due decorum.

The first dish consisted of sour beet-root soup, with mushrooms and potatoes in it. After this came herrings, rolled in flour and fried in oil. Then there was a dish of cabbage and mushrooms, also seasoned with oil. And, to crown the feast, Yagna had prepared a most dainty dish—buckwheat meal, mixed with honey and fried in oil of poppy-seed! With all these dishes, they ate common dry bread: it was not becoming, on such a great fast-day, to eat either cakes or *strucle*, these containing butter or milk.

They ate for a considerable time, and there was but



little conversation; only spoons clattered and lips were smacked. Boryna wanted to get up and help Yagna, but her mother would not have it.

"Let her be," she said; "it will do her no harm. 'Tis the first Yule-tide at which she presides; she must learn and accustom herself."

Lapa, whimpering at times, was poking its head against thighs and knees, fawning and wagging its tail, in hope of getting sooner fed. Bociek the stork, whose place was in the passage, ever and anon pecked at the wall, or uttered its *klek-klek-klek*, to which the hens at roost responded.

The meal was not over yet, when someone tapped at the window.

Dominikova cried out: "Let no one in, no, nor even look that way! It is the Evil One: he will enter, and then stay here all the year round!"

The spoons dropped, and they listened in dismay, as the tapping was repeated.

"It is Kuba's soul!" Yuzka whispered.

"Say no foolish things: someone in need is there. On this day, none should suffer hunger, or be without a roof over him." So saying, Roch got up and opened the door.

It was Yagustynka, standing humbly on the threshold, who wept abundantly, and begged to be let in.

"Oh, give me but a corner, and what you leave your dog! Have pity on a poor old woman! . . . I was waiting for my children to ask me; I waited in vain, starved with cold in my hut. . . . O Lord! I am now a beggar-woman; and they leave me here, forlorn, without a morsel of bread—worse off than a dog! . . . And their cabin is full of people and of noise. I crept thither, looked round the corner and in at the window. . . . It was all of no use."

"Well, sit ye down with us. Better had it been to come when evening fell, and not expect favours from your children.—They will rejoice when they drive a last nail into your coffin, to make sure you will not come back to them." Thus Boryna spoke, and very kindly made a place for her by his side.

But she was unable to eat anything, however heartily Yagna, the least stingy of housewives, pressed her to take some food. It was impossible; she sat drooping, bent, crouching, taciturn, her trembling body showing how much she suffered.

The place was now cosy and quiet, pervaded by an atmosphere of kindliness and of solemn piety, as if the Holy Child were lying in the midst of them.

A huge fire, continually supplied with fresh fuel, was droning up the chimney, lighting the whole apartment; against its blaze the glazed images shone dazzlingly, the panes loomed black in the night. And now they seated themselves in front of the fire, on the long bench, and talked together in hushed and serious tones.

Presently Yagna made coffee, with plenty of sugar in it, which they sipped at leisure.

After a pause, Roch took out a book, round which he had wound his rosary, and began to read to them in a low voice that was full of deep emotion:

"Lo, a new thing hath come to pass to-day: a Virgin hath brought forth a Son: our Lord hath in the town of Bethlehem, not least of Judah's cities, entered this our world in poverty, within a wretched byre, on hay, amongst the cattle, which were all His brethren on this night. And that same star, which now is gleaming, gleamed upon the Child, showing the way unto the Three Wise Men: who, albeit black and heathens, yet were kind of heart, and came from far-off lands, across wide rolling seas with gifts; and thus bore witness to the Truth. . . ."

He continued reading a long time and his voice took the intonations of a prayer, almost of a chant or the singing of some holy litany. They listened to him in pious stillness, their souls silent and attentive, their hearts thrilling under the fascination of the miraculous, with the sincerest gratitude to God for the favours conferred upon them.

"Ah, sweet Jesus! Didst Thou then deign to be born in a stable, in that far-off country, amongst filthy Jews and cruel heretics—and in such poverty—and in such wintry



frost! O poor, poor Holy One, O sweet Child!"—Such were their thoughts, and their bosoms throbbed with pity, and their souls flew away like birds, over land and sea, to the place of the Nativity, to the Manger and the Crib over which the Angels sang—and to the Sacred Feet of the Child Jesus. There they fell, with all the might of their fiery faith and trust in Him; and they surrendered themselves to Him—His faithful servants for ever and ever. Amen!

As Roch went on reading, Yuzka, who was a good, kind, impressionable girl, fell to weeping copiously over our Lord's unhappy lot. Yagna, too, wept with her face in her hands and her head hidden behind Andrew, who was listening close by, with mouth wide open, and so greatly struck by what he heard, that he repeatedly pulled Simon by his sleeve, saying: "Lo! do you hear that, Simon?"

When it was over, some remarks were dropped:

"Poor Child! not even a cradle!"

"I marvel that He did not freeze."

"And that our Lord was willing to bear so much pain."

"Because," Roch answered, "it was only by His sufferings and sacrifice that He could save His people: which had He not done, Satan would assuredly have been master of the world and lord of every soul."

"Of this and these he is pretty much master and lord as it is," Yagustynka muttered.

"Sin is master, wickedness lord; and these are the helpers of Satan."

"Ah, well, whosoever it may be, one thing is sure: an ill fate has power over man."

"Speak not thus, lest ye sin: ye are blinded by wrath against your children."

The rebuke was stern, and she did not dispute its justice. The others also were silent, and Simon rose to withdraw; but his mother, attentive to everything, noticed him.

"Wither away so fast?" she hissed.

"Out—I feel too hot in here," he faltered, taken aback.

"Going to Nastka—to divert yourself, hey?"



"Would ye forbid, or hold me back?" he growled, but threw his cap back on to the chest where it had been.

"Return with Andrew to our hut: we have left the place to the care of Providence. See to the kine, and stay there for me; when I have rejoined you, we shall all go together to church." These were her orders; but as the lads were slow to obey, she did not repeat them; rising at once, she took an altar-bread from the table.

"Vitek, light the lantern; we are going to the kine. In this Yule-tide night, all the animals understand what men say, because our Lord was born in their midst. And whosoever shall, being without sin, speak unto them then, him will they answer with a human voice: this day they are the equals of man, and they are our fellows. And therefore we shall go and share the altar-bread with them."

All made for the byre, Vitek leading, lantern in hand.

The cows were lying in a row, leisurely chewing the cud; but the approach of the lantern and the voices caused them to snort and scramble heavily to their feet, turning their great heads away from the light.

"You, Yagna, are mistress here; it is yours to divide this bread amongst them: so will they thrive and not take any sickness. But let them not be milked till to-morrow evening, or they will give no more milk at all."

Yagna broke an altar-bread into five pieces, made the sign of the cross over each cow between her horns, and laid the thin bit of wafer upon her broad rough tongue.

Yuzka wanted to know whether the horses were also to get their share of the bread.

"It must not be; there were no horses in the byre where Christ was born."

When they had returned, Roch spoke thus:

"Every being, every meanest blade of grass, every little pebble, nay, even the star that is all but unseen to the eye—everything feels to-day, everything knows that the Lord is born."

"My God!" Yagna exclaimed. "What! even clods and stones?"

"I speak sooth: it is so. Everything has its soul. All beings in the world have feeling, and await the hour when Jesus, taking pity on them, shall say:

"'Awake, O soul, and live, and merit Heaven!'—Yes, and the tiniest worm, the swaying grass even, can after its fashion have merit, and praise the Lord in its own way. . . . And to-night, of all nights in the year, they all rise up, full of life, and listen, waiting for His Word!

"And to some it comes now, but to others not yet: they lie patient in the dark, expecting the dawn; stones, water-drops, clods, trees, and whatever God has appointed each of them to be!"

Mute, they all pondered over the words he said; for he had spoken, and in sapient wise, and words which touched the heart. Yet both Boryna and Dominikova had doubts as to the truth of these; and, much as they turned them over and over in their minds, they could not clear up the matter. For, though God's Omnipotence was indeed marvellous and beyond all thought, still—that everything should have a soul!—this was what they could not grasp. But now, the smith having come in with his family, they set these thoughts aside.

"We shall sit up with you, Father, and then go together to midnight mass," he said.

"Sit down," said Boryna; "it will be more pleasant with you. We shall be all together, save for Gregory."

Yuzka looked indignantly at her father, for she thought of Antek: but she durst not say anything.

Once more they took their seats on benches by the fire; but Pete went out into the yard to chop fire-wood against the coming great Day of Rest, Vitek taking the chopped wood in his arms and piling it up in the passage.

"Ah! but I had forgotten!" cried the smith. "The Voyt ran and asked me to tell Dominikova she was to come at once; for his wife is in travail and screams so that she is likely to be confined this very night."

"I would have liked to go to church with you all; but since you say she screams, I must look in."



Having whispered with the smith's wife, she hastened away, for she was an expert in these matters, and to many had done more good than the doctors.

Various legends relating to the day were told by Roch: one of them was as follows:

"Long ago—as many years back as from now to Christ's Birth—a certain wealthy husbandman was walking home from market, where he had sold a couple of fatted calves, and had the money concealed in one of his boots. He bore a stout cudgel and was stout himself—perhaps the strongest fellow in his village. But he was in a hurry to get home ere nightfall, because in those days thieves used to hide in the woods and waylay true men.

"This must have been in summer, for the greenwood was fragrant and resounded with many a sweet song; a mighty wind rocked the trees, and there was an uproarious rustling overhead. Now, therefore, the man went along in haste, looking around him and fearing. But he saw only young and old pines and oaks standing side by side, and never a living soul. Yet he feared, for he was approaching a cross, and close by was so dense a thicket, the eye could not see to pierce it: there thieves were mostly wont to hide. So he crossed himself and, saying prayers in a loud voice, ran on as fast as he could.

"He had without hurt passed out of the wood of tall trees, and had gone through the undergrowth of dwarf pines and of juniper-bushes. Already he could see the green of the open country, hear the streamlets babbling and gurgling along and the lark singing on high; and he noted men ploughing and flocks of storks winging their way over the marshes; nay, he had even caught the scent of the cheery-orchards in blossom: when out of the last of the thickets the robbers came leaping upon him! They were twelve, all armed with knives. Bravely he fought, and though they soon overpowered him, he would not give up his money, and shrieked for help. So they threw him down, put their knees on his chest, and were going to slay him. Suddenly, they were all struck motionless, and remained so—bending over



him, knives in air, full of rage, but, as it were, turned to stone!—And at that same instant all things around also became still as death. The birds, silent, floated moveless in air—the streams rested—the sun rolled on no more—the wind fell dead—the trees remained as they were bent by the wind—and the corn also. And the storks seemed fixed in the sky, with outstretched wings . . . and the ploughman remained with whip raised over his horse where it stood . . . and the whole region, as if terror-struck, became immobile like a picture.

“How long this lasted, none can tell, but it endured until men heard upon earth the Angels’ chant:

‘Christ comes: fear Him, O ye mighty!’

when immediately all things began to move again. But the thieves took the warning given them by this prodigy, and released their victim; and they went together, following the voices they heard, to the stable; there they paid homage to the new-born Babe, along with all the creatures which lived on earth or in air.”

They wondered much at the legend told them; but presently Boryna and the smith began to talk of other matters.

After a time, too, Yagustynka, who had all the time sat silent, spoke out, and with no pleasant words.

“Oh, ye talk, ye talk, ye talk: and wherefore, but only to make time pass? Were it true that of old there came from heaven those who protected the wretched and saved them from the oppressor: then why do they not come now too? Is there now less of poverty, less of misery, less of torture and of pain? Man is like a poor bird, unarmed, and let loose to fly about the world. The hawk, the beasts of prey, and want of food slay it; and him Crossbones always takes in the end.—And ye prate of mercy, and feed fools with promises, deluding them and saying that salvation is at hand!—Ah, who is at hand?—Antichrist! and he will deal out justice, and He will have mercy, even as the hawk has mercy on the chickens!”

Roch started up. "Woman!" he cried in a thundering voice; "do not blaspheme! do not hearken sinfully to the whispers of the Wicked One, that will drag you down to your damnation and to everlasting fire!"—But he fell back upon the bench, and could speak no more for the sobs that choked his voice, and shuddered from head to foot with horror and with sorrow for that lost soul. And when somewhat calmer, he set the truth before her with all the power of a firm believer, striving to bring her back into the right way.

He spoke to her long—very long; and as well as a priest in the pulpit.

Meanwhile Vitek, having been greatly struck to hear that cattle possessed human speech on Christmas Eve, called Yuzka away quietly, and they went both of them to the cow-house.

Holding each other by the hands, trembling with awe, and crossing themselves more than once, they slipped in amongst the cows.

Down they knelt by the side of the largest one, that they looked on as the Mother of the Byre. Out of breath, agitated, with tears in their eyes and dread in their hearts, as if they were in church and during the Elevation—they nevertheless were upheld by strong trust and a lively faith. Vitek put his mouth to her ear, and quavered in a low voice:

"Hist! Grey One! Grey One!"

But she only gurgled inaudibly, and went on chewing with a roll of her tongue and a smack of her lips.

"Something strange has come upon her: she answers naught!"

Then they knelt by the next cow, and Vitek, who by this time was on the verge of weeping, called earnestly to her:

"Spotted One! Spotted One!"

They both approached very close to her mouth, and listened, holding their breath; but never, never a word!

"Ah! no doubt we have sinned, so we shall not hear her speak. They answer only such as are sinless; and we are sinners!"



"True, Yuzka, true! we are sinful, we have sinned. O Lord! so it is! Aye, I stole some bits of string from master once. And an old strap besides. . . . Yes, and also . . ." He could go no farther; remorse and repentance for his faults shook the lad with a convulsion of tears and sobs; and Yuzka, following his example, wept from the bottom of her heart. They cried together, and would not be comforted till they had laid bare before each other all their "manifold sins and offences."

At home, no one remarked their absence, for all were piously singing hymns—not Christmas carols, which it was not deemed proper to strike up until after midnight.

On the other side of the house, Pete was having a wash and making a grand toilet. He had completely changed his clothes, Yagna having brought him another suit of his, that he had put by in the store-room.

But what a cry arose when he appeared before them, clad—no longer in his military cloak and grey uniform—but in the usual garb of a peasant!

"They laughed at me and nicknamed me Grey Dog," he faltered; "so I have changed my clothes."

"Change your speech, and not your garments!" Yagustynka snarled.

"That likewise he will get back, since his soul has remained Polish."

"And what marvel if he should forget something, after five years far away, never once hearing his mother-tongue spoken?"

Here they broke off their talk; the high-pitched tinkle of the mass-bell was now heard in the chamber.

"We must be off: it is ringing for the shepherd's mass!"

And in a very short time all had set out, save Yagustynka. She stayed to watch the house, and still more to loose the reins in solitude to the bitterness of her heart.

The mass-bell meantime rang, rang, rang, like the quick twitter of a bird, calling them to church.

Out of their cabins they poured; now and then a ruddy refulgence shone from the opening and closing doors, with a

flash as of lightning. In some huts, the fire was put out or covered. In the dark night, as they hurried on, a voice would be heard, or a cough, and the crunching of shoes on the snow, and the holy words of mutual greeting: and on they went, deeper and deeper into the dark-grey blackness, till only their footsteps sounded in the frozen air.

From afar they now began to perceive the glowing church-windows, and the great door thrown open and pouring forth light, and the people surging in—billows on billows, slowly filling the aisle, decorated with Christmas trees of many a kind; crowded along the white walls, swarming in front of the altar, filling the pews in an ever-rising flood, rolling and undulating to and fro with the incoming human tide, which brought in along with it a fog of condensed breath-vapour, so thick that the altar-lights shone dim and scarcely seen through its folds.

And still the people came in, came in continually.

They arrived from Polne Rudki in a compact mass, great tall fellows, ponderous, yet active, all flaxen-haired, all clad in blue-black capotes; their women comely, every one of them, adorned with "double" aprons, and having for head-gear caps underneath red kerchiefs.

Next came in straggling knots of twos and threes, the men of Modlitsa: poor sickly wretches, strengthless creatures, in grey patched capotes, and all bearing sticks, for they had come on foot. Of these the common tavern joke was that they lived on mud-fishes only, because their lands were miry and intersected with marshes, and their garments smelt of the peat they used for fuel.

From Vola, too, came some, by separate families, like the juniper-bushes that always grow in thick clumps and close together: none of them tall, but all of middle height, stumpy and not unlike sacks of corn, yet lively fellows: great talkers, most stubbornly litigious, given to fighting, and spoilers of the forests. They were in grey capotes, with facings of black braid, and red girdles.

There, too, was the "nobility" of Rzepki, which, as evil tongues say, "has only a bag and a bundle, one cow for five



and one cap for three"; they came all in one band, taciturn, looking down and askance at everyone they met. Their womenfolk, dressed like manor-people, very much pranked out, very handsome, white of complexion and voluble of tongue, walked in their midst, and were treated by them with the utmost courtesy.

Directly after them entered the men of Przylek, tall, slender and strong as trees in a pine-forest, and so decked out as to make the eye water: white capotes, red waistcoats, shirts adorned with green ribbons, breeches striped with yellow bands; and they pushed forwards, giving way to no one, till they got quite close to the altar.

And then, almost the last of all, like so many squires, in walked the people of Debie. They were but few; each went apart from the others, strutting proudly forwards, and took his place in the pews next to the high altar, having precedence of everyone; self-confident, because wealthy. Their womenfolk carried prayer-books, and wore white caps tied under the chin, and jackets of dark-coloured cloth.—And then there were also men from the more remote hamlets, from many a little cluster of huts, from sawmills, and from manors too—but who could count them all?

And in this multitude, pressed and surging and rustling like a wood in a breeze, the white capotes of the Lipka men and their women's red kerchiefs were conspicuous.

The church was full, even to the very last place in the porch, and anyone who came late had to pray outside under the trees in the cold.

Now the priest began the first mass, and the organ pealed forth, while all the people swayed to and fro, and bowed down, and knelt before the Divine Majesty.

There was a deep hush; fervent prayers went up; every eye was fixed on the priest, and on the one taper that burned high above and in the middle of the altar. The organ played soft music, fugues and harmonies so touchingly sweet that they sent a thrill to the very heart. At times the priest turned to the people with outstretched hands, uttering aloud certain sacred Latin words; and the people too extended their

arms, sighing audibly, and, bending down in deep contrition, struck their breasts and prayed with fervour.

Then, when the first mass was over, the priest mounted the pulpit, spoke of the sacred festival, and exhorted them to flee all things evil: his words went to their hearts like fire, and sounded like thunder through the church. Of his hearers, some sighed, some beat their breasts; others were sharply stung by remorse, and others again—those in particular who were of amatory disposition—fell a-weeping. For the priest spoke with true zeal and eloquence, his words went straight to the heart and mind; and however drowsy the heat in the church had made more than one, even these could not but listen to him.

Just before the second mass, the organ pealed out again, and the priest intoned the famous carol:

“Come to meet Him—come to greet Him!”

and the people started up from their knees as one man, with a billowing swirl, took up the tune, and roared in unison, with a loud blast from each man's lungs:

“Jesus in the manger laid!”

The Christmas trees vibrated and shook with the din, and the lights flickered in the enormous volume of sound.

So united were they, in souls and faith and voices, that it seemed as if a giant were trolling forth that tremendous chant that rolled, carrying every heart along with it, to the sacred feet of the Divine Child!

When the second mass was over, the organist struck up one Christmas carol after another, and to such lively leaping measures that it was all they could do to hold back from leaping too; but at any rate they all turned round to the organ-loft, and shouted the words in tune and time with the music.

Antek alone was not singing with the others. He had come with his wife and with Staho's family, but had let them go on before him, he himself standing close to the pews.



He had no mind to take his old place among the farmers in front of the altar, and was looking for a place somewhere else, when he perceived his father coming in with all his family, pushing forward to the centre of the nave, with Yagna going first of them all.

He shrank back behind a young fir-tree, and thenceforward never took his eyes off her. She sat down at the end of a pew close to the side gangway; and he, unconsciously obeying instinct, pressed forward with stubborn jostling, till he was close to her; and when all knelt down during mass, he too knelt and bent forward so that his head touched her knees.

She at first took no notice of him: the rushlight she was using to read by shed so faint a glimmer round, and the fir boughs concealed him so well that he could not be seen. It was only at the Elevation, when, going down on her knees, she beat her breast and bowed her head in adoration, that she happened to look in his direction—and her heart suddenly stopped beating, and she was petrified with joy.

She durst not look a second time. What she had seen was but a dream to her; a vision—a “false creation,” and no more.

She closed her eyes and remained long on her knees, with head bowed down, and body bent forward—almost beside herself with excitement. At last, however, she seated herself and looked him straight in the face.

Yes, it was really he—Antek—his face very haggard and bronzed; and those eyes of his, so bold and daring, now looked into hers with such sorrowful tenderness that her heart was smitten through and through with affectionate apprehension, and the tears came to her eyes.

Like the other women there, she sat stiffly, apparently reading in her book in which she saw not a single letter, nor even the page before her. What she did see was his face—his eyes, so sad, so full of appeal, flashing, blazing, bright as stars, coming between her and the rest of the world. She felt lost and helpless—and he was kneeling by her side; and she heard his quick breath and felt it hot, and was aware of the dear, yet awful might which went forth

from him, seized upon her heart, bound it to him as with cords, thrilling her at once with pleasure and dismay—with a vertiginous shuddering, and a cry for love so potent that her every limb quaked, and her heart beat wildly like some poor bird nailed in sport by the wings to a barn-door!

The second mass was now over, and the people were all singing together, and praying and sighing and weeping; but these two, as if beyond this world, heard nothing, saw nothing, thought of nothing but each other.

Dread — joy — affection — remembrance — enchantment — desire!—all these feelings alternately glowed within them, passing from one to the other, and knitting them in one, so that they felt themselves one being, and their two hearts throbbed in unison, and one fire flamed in the eyes of each.

Antek came yet a little nearer, leaned his shoulder against her hip (and a hot flush surged over her, and she was nigh to swooning); and as she knelt again, he flung these words—words that might have been brands of fire—into her ear: "Yagna! Yagna!"

She shook, and almost fell fainting; his voice pierced her through and through with keen rapture—with a sharp-edged delight.

"Come out some evening . . . come out . . . behind the haystack . . . I shall be waiting there every night. . . . Fear not . . . I must speak to you. . . . 'Tis urgent.—Come." This he said in an impassioned whisper, very close to her—so close that his breath was like a flame upon her face.

She replied nothing: the words stuck in her throat. Her heart was palpitating so violently that she thought everyone near her must have heard it. But she made a gesture as if she would go that very instant where he wished, where her love was urging her . . . behind the haystack.

The church was resounding with the joyful thunder of the carols, when she came a little to her senses, and looked round at the people and the sanctuary.

Antek was there no more. He had withdrawn unnoticed, and was slowly walking out into the churchyard.



There he stood in the frost a long time, beneath the belfry, that he might cool down a little and breathe some fresh air. But his bosom was so overflowing with gladness, there was in him such an exultation, such a triumph of power, that he never even heard the chant that welled out from the open church door, nor the faint echoes which repeated it from the bells above. No, he took no heed of anything whatsoever. . . .

Seizing a handful of snow, and swallowing it greedily, he leapt over the wall and into the road—rushing away, out on to the country-side, wayward as the blast.

## CHAPTER V

THE Boryna family returned from church very late; and but a few minutes later, they were all in bed, snoring loud. All except Yagna alone. Wearied though she was, she did not fall asleep. She turned on her pillow, she even threw the blanket over her head: it was of no avail; sleep would not come. In its stead there came a sort of nightmare, and fell upon her, and crushed her with its weight. She could neither breathe, nor cry out, nor jump from her bed. There she lay, numb, drowsy, in that half-awake state when the mind spins out memories all the while and goes over the world with them—rising far above the earth, arraying itself in the sun's splendour, and yet no more capable of any activity in itself than is a reflection in clear wind-rippled water.

Thus it was with her: though she did not fall asleep, yet her mind was wandering about like a bird through the days of the dead past, through those times that were now no more, and lived only in memory. She was back again in the church, with Antek kneeling beside her, and speaking—speaking—and burning her with those eyes of flame, and filling her with a sweet torture and dismay! . . . And then appeared the flushed and threatening face of the priest, and his hand stretched out over the people . . . and the lighted tapers. . . . Then came other reminiscences—old ones: her meetings with Antek . . . their kisses—their embraces . . . till she was full of such a fever of excitement and delectation that she stretched and pressed herself down on the pillow with all her might. . . . And then, once more, she heard, clear and distinct, the words: "Come out! Come out!" And it seemed to her that, rising at the call, she walked, walked on, skulking along through the brushwood



in the dark, shaken with terror, followed by a hue-and-cry, and an awful wind blowing after her among the shadows.

And so this went on unceasingly, one impression after another . . . and a third . . . and a fourth . . . and so on, beyond counting: she could in no wise either get rid of these fancies of hers or control them. A nightmare had her in its clutches; or . . . was it Satan preparing her to sin by tempting her thus?

It was broad day when she got out of bed, and she felt as though she had spent the night on a rack. Every bone in her ached; she was pale, worn out, unspeakably miserable.

The frost had slackened a little, but the weather was dull. Now and again it snowed; and then a great wind would spring up, worry the trees, and go whistling down the road. The village, however, was lively and full of the gladness of Yule-tide, and the roads swarmed with folk. Some were dashing by in sledges; some talked outside their huts or went visiting their neighbours; and the children played about in the lanes, and there was everywhere noise and merriment in plenty.

But of merriment there was little in Yagna's heart. For all the joyous flickering of the fire on the hearth, she felt cold: moody in spite of all the mirth and din around her, and the gay songs of Yuzka, ringing through the cabin. Though amongst her own people, she was alone—so terribly alone that she was afraid to look upon them.

And frequently, whilst letting her fancy listen to Antek's passionate whispers, she could not help hearing at the same time certain other words that went to her soul with no less force:

"To all such God's wrath is reserved, and everlasting damnation!"—She could distinctly hear the priest's voice, and see his glowing face, and his hand stretched out in a threatening gesture.

She quailed at the vision, feeling acutely the depth of her guilt.—"Then I will not go, I will not! It were a mortal sin, a mortal sin!" she repeated to herself, striving to find in these words the strength to resist and a shield against evil.

But then her soul revolted with the pain of it; for indeed she was attracted to him with all the might and bent of her vital forces, and turned towards him as a snow-burdened tree turns towards the sun in spring.

But the fear of sin had still the upper hand, and she did her best to forget him—forget him for ever! . . . She now stayed at home, fearing to go anywhere about the premises, lest he might be lurking about and call to her. . . . For would she then be able to resist, and not to follow his voice?

She set about diligently to perform her home duties; but there was little to be done. Yuzka managed all; besides, the old man was always after her, unwilling to have her put her hand to anything.

"Rest yourself; do not work too much, lest some untimely harm come upon you!"

So she did nothing, and only wandered aimlessly about the cabin, or looked out of the windows—at nothing—or stood idle in the passage. Meanwhile her longing and her desire increased continually; and her irritation as well. She was angered by her husband's watchful eyes, angered by the joy and liveliness that filled the place; angered even by Bociek the stork, walking about the hut, and flapped her apron to drive it away. At last, when she could bear things no longer, she chose a convenient opportunity, and ran over to her mother's hut. But she went there straight across the pond, looking round in fear, lest he should be lurking somewhere behind a tree.

Her mother was not at home; she had only looked in early in the day, and then returned to attend the Voyt's wife. Andrew sat smoking by the fireside, while Simon dressed himself in the bedroom.

Back in her old place, amongst her own furniture and surroundings, a change came over her and her irritation disappeared. She was once more in her element, and began instinctively to move about and do things: going to the cow-house, straining out the milk which had since the morning been standing in the pail, throwing corn to the fowls, sweeping the room, setting things in order, and meantime



keeping up a brisk conversation with her two brothers; for Simon, having put on a new capote, had now come in, and was doing his hair before the looking-glass.

"So carefully dressed?—Whither away?"

"To the village, to meet a few lads at the Ploshkas'."

"And . . . will mother let you go?"

"I shall not everlastingly ask her leave: my reason is my own; so is my will."

"Surely, surely," Andrew chimed in timorously, looking out into the road.

"You are to know," the other cried with a bold air, "that what I do, I will do in spite of her. To the Ploshkas', aye, and to the tavern as well, will I go, and drink with the other lad."

"A calf wants but its mother's teat, yet wanders everywhere for it. So with the fool, whose will's his rule," she murmured to herself, not caring to contradict him, nor indeed paying much heed to what he said. She was to return home now, and had so small a mind to do so, that it was almost with tears that she took leave of them, and dragged herself slowly away.

At her cabin, it was still noisier and merrier than before. Nastka had run in, and was laughing so gaily with Yuzka that Yagna could hear them out in the road.

"Do you know? my rod has blossomed!" she cried to Yagna as the latter entered.

"Your rod? what rod?"

"The one I cut on St. Andrew's night, planted in sand upon the stove—and behold, it has blossomed! I looked at it yesterday, and there was not a single blossom yet."

She brought the pot of sand to show her; there stood in it a rather large spray of a cherry-tree, studded with delicate blossoms.

"Oh, what fragrant pink flowers!" said Vitek wistfully.

"So they are, so they are!"

All crowded round, and gazed on the sweet-scented spray with great joy and wonder. But just then Yagustynka came

in, now again her former self, loud of speech, bold, and always seeking an opportunity to sting someone to the quick.

"Aye, Yuzka, the rod has blossomed, but not for you: what you need yet is the strap, or a good stout cudgel!" Thus she spoke at once on entering.

"For me, for me, it has blossomed!" she cried. "I myself cut it on St. Andrew's night: I myself!"

"But," Yagna explained, "you are as yet too young; no doubt it has foretold Nastka's marriage."

"We both together put it in the pot; but I cut it, and so it has blossomed for me!" Yuzka insisted, while the tears sprang to her eyes, because her right to the prediction was not admitted.

"Plenty of time before you, Yuzka, to run after young men and wait at stiles for them: let your elders go first," said Yagna, smiling at Nastka. "So, Yuzka, be quiet.—Here's news for you all: that Magda who was at the organist's gave birth in the church porch last night!"

"Can such a thing be?"

"It can, for it has been. When Ambrose went out to ring, he stumbled over the girl."

"O Lord! and she did not die of cold?"

"No, not she; but her child did. Yet she all but died herself. They took her to the priest's dwelling, and they are tending her still. But . . . 'twere better they had let her alone. What has she to live for? Can aught of good come to her now?"

"Matthew told me that when the organist turned her away, she was always at the miller's, and staying there overnight, till at last—probably by the miller's directions—her Franek beat her and sent her flying."

"Well," said Yagustynka, "what was he to do with her? Frame her like a picture and hang her up, hey?—Franek is like his fellows: 'He of oaths made a lot; what he wanted he got—and then kept them not.' Not faultless he, not by any means: but the organist is by far the worst of all. While she was well, they made her work as much as a yoke



of oxen ploughing: she alone did everything for them. And now, as soon as she is ill, they have driven her away! A murrain on such folk!"

"But," Naska cried, "wherefore did she yield to Franek?"

"And you also would yield to Yasyek, were you but sure that the banns would follow!"

Nastka took offense at this, and a quarrel seemed imminent, but Boryna came in at that moment, and they said no more.

"Do ye know about Magda? She is still living, but in a dead faint. Had she been left there the space of another 'Pater,' Ambrose says, she would have turned up her toes. Roch is rubbing her with snow, and giving her to drink; but they think she will not be well for a long time."

"And whither is she to go then, poor thing?"

"No doubt the Koziols will take her to their home: she is a kinswoman of theirs."

"The Koziols, indeed! Why, they have naught themselves but what they can filch or get by cheating: how could they nurse her? And here we have so many wealthy men and landowners, and none will come forward to help her!"

"Yes, yes," Boryna said; "farmers have endless treasures, and everything falls to them from the sky, and their only business is to help everyone! What, shall I gather all the needy on all the highways, bring them in here, and feed and nurse them, and pay the doctor for them, perhaps, into the bargain?—Ye are old, Yagustynka, and the wind blows in your head."

"I say not that anyone can be forced to aid the needy; but yet men are not beasts, nor should they be left to perish out of doors."

"Well, things in this world are as they are, and must remain so, and ye will not change them."

"Long ago, before the war—in the days when the nobles were masters, there was, I remember, a hospital in the village for poor people. Yes, and it was in the very house where the organist dwells now. And I remember, too, folk had to pay to keep it up—so much out of every acre they had."

Boryna was annoyed and surly: he did not care to discuss the matter, and closed the debate with:

"Talking of this will do as much good as incense burnt to bring the dead to life."

"True, no good at all. On him that feels no pity for the cries of those who suffer, their tears too will have no effect. The thriving man thinks that all in this world goes well and as God has commanded."

To this Boryna gave no reply, so Yagustynka turned to Nastka.

"And what about Matthew's ribs? Any better?"

"Matthew? why, what has befallen him?"

"What!" Nastka exclaimed; "do ye not know of it? It came to pass ere Yule-tide. . . . Your Antek flew at him, took him by the throat, carried him out of the mill, and dashed him against the fence so hard that the railing broke. He fell in and was like to drown. Now he is ill, and spits blood, and cannot move. Ambrose says he has four ribs broken, and his womb is out of place.<sup>1</sup> And now he is always moaning and groaning."

She burst into tears.

At the first words, Yagna had started up, struck with the feeling that the fight had been about herself. But presently she sat down again upon a chest, pressing her lips to the cherry-blossoms to cool them.

Those of the house were astounded: though the incident was the talk of the whole village, no whisper of it had yet come to Boryna's cabin.

He growled: "Like has fallen foul of like—one ruffian of another. No great harm done!"

"But," Yagna inquired after a pause, "why did they fight?"

"On account of you!" the old woman said, with a spiteful snarl.

"Pray speak the truth!"

"It is as I say. Matthew was at the mill, boasting in

<sup>1</sup> Compare this anatomical error with what Falstaff says, "Henry IV," Part 2, Act IV, Sc. 3.—*Translator's Note.*



the presence of some men that he had been with you in your bedroom. . . . And Antek heard, and gave him a beating."

"Spare me your jests; I have no mind to hear them!"

"Will you not believe me? Then ask the whole village; they will tell you the same. Did I say that Matthew was speaking true? Nay, I only repeated the village talk."

"He is a liar . . . a foul liar and a villain!"

"Who can protect you from evil tongues? They will often slander you beyond the grave."

"'Tis well . . . 'tis well he beat him! . . . I fain would add to the beating!" she hissed vindictively.

"Oho! The chicken's claws turn a hawk's talons!"

"Aye! for the lie he told, I would kill him on the spot, the false hound!"

"To everyone I say he lies, but they believe me not, and backbite you."

"Oh, but Antek will silence them—cut their tongues out!"

Yagustynka leered at her maliciously. "Is he to fight the whole world for you, eh?"

"O you Judas woman, you! With your sly hints and whispers, and the joy you take in giving pain!"

Yagna was now in a towering passion; perhaps she had never yet been so angry in her life. What she felt would have been beyond bearing, but for Antek's conduct that she now heard of. She was flooded with tenderness, and unspeakable gratitude filled her heart that he had so well taken her part and avenged her. Nevertheless, she exhibited so much ill temper at everything that went on in the house, and rated Yuzka and Vitek so sternly for every trifle, that old Boryna felt uneasy, and came to sit by her side, stroking her face and asking:

"What is it ails my Yagna?"

"What should ail me? Naught.—Let me be: would ye make love before everybody?" And she pushed him roughly away.

"He would soothe and blandish and cuddle her, would he? That withered fellow, that spent worn-out old man!" she thought, and a feeling of strong dislike welled up within

her. Not till now had she noticed his age; now, for the first time, there came to her a sense of loathing, a deep-seated repugnance, almost hatred. She now looked upon him with glad concealed contempt; for he had really aged a good deal in these last days: his hands were shaking, and he dragged his feet and stooped.

"That nerveless old driveller!"

She shook herself with disgust, and set to thinking all the more intensely of Antek. No longer did she strive against the memories that pressed upon her, nor seek not to hear those sweet tempting whispers of his.

The day dragged on, intolerably slow. Every minute she would go out into the porch, or as far as the orchard behind the hut, and look through the trees at the fields beyond . . . or lean against the wattled fence which stood between her and the village road that ran past the farm buildings. With wistful looks, she would scan the country-side—the snow-covered lands—the dark forest at the sky-line. . . . But she took note of nothing, so deep was she plunged in the joyous knowledge that *he* cared for her, and would let no one do her wrong.

"And he would serve anyone the same! What a man he is, what a fighter!" she thought with tender admiration. "Oh, if he came in sight now, I could not resist him for one instant!"

The haystack stood close by, near the road, but at some distance within the field. Flocks of sparrows chirruped round it, and took shelter in a great hole that had been scooped out of one side. The farm-lad, though ordered by Boryna to go up and take the hay always from the top, had not cared to do so, but pulled truss after truss out of the side, till enough had gone to form a sort of small den, in which two persons might easily find room.

"Come out—come out behind the haystack!" Her mind was continually repeating Antek's petition. But now she ran back to the hut; the bells were beginning to ring for Vespers, and she herself had a longing to go to church, in the vague hope of meeting him there.



Him she did not meet: but instead, in the very entrance, she saw Hanka, greeted her, and held back for her to put her hand first into the holy water stoup. But Hanka neither made answer nor stretched out her hand to the stoup, but passed on, darting out of her eyes a look at her—a deadly look! as though she would have stoned her willingly.

Yagna's eyes grew dim. Such a slight! so open an exhibition of hate! Yet, from the pew in which she seated herself, she could not help fixing her eyes on that pallid face.

"Antek's wife—and so haggard, so ghastly to see! Well, well!" But her thoughts soon wandered away from Hanka. They were singing in the choir, and the organ played sweet music, so low and soft and mysterious that it absorbed all her attention. Never, no, never had she felt so happy in church, so serenely blissful! She did not even say prayers; her book lay before her unopened; her beads were in her hand, but she did not tell them. She sighed dreamily, and looked up to see the shadows creeping slowly in through the windows, and to gaze on the pictures, the scintillating lights, the gilded woodwork, and the now scarce visible many-coloured decorations. Amongst all these marvels, her soul soared up, lost itself in the painted skies, in the chanted prayers and the faint dying melodies that she heard. Dissolved in a serene ecstasy, oblivious of everything round her, she fancied she saw the saints come down out of their pictures, approach her with smiles of infinite kindness, and stretch forth their hands in blessings over her and over all the people.

She ceased to dream only when Evensong was at an end and the organ hushed. The silence roused her from her trance; unwillingly she rose and went out with the others. And now again, at the church-door, she met with Hanka, who stood and faced her as though intending to speak—but only darted a look of hatred at her and went out.

"What, does the silly woman think to daunt me by glaring?" was Yagna's mental comment as she walked home.

Evening had fallen now—quiet, dull, holy. It was murky outside; the stars' faint light shone dim in the hazy sky;

a little snow came down, flake by flake, looking like long fluffy threads, and noiselessly fluttering past the window-panes.

In the cabin, too, it was quiet and somewhat dull. Simon had come as soon as evening had closed in—ostensibly to visit them, but really to meet with Nastka; and the two sat side by side, talking in low voices. Boryna was not home yet. Yagustynka sat on one side of the fire-place, peeling potatoes. On the other, Pete was playing a tune on his violin, very gently, but with such sad notes that now and then Lapa would whine, or vent a long-drawn howl. Vitek was there too, along with Yuzka. After a time, Yagna, whom the tune made nervous, called out from the bedroom:

"Pete, pray leave off: that music of yours is too dismal!"

And the violin sounded no more. But presently it was heard anew; for subdued strains, all but inaudible, now came from the stable, whither Pete had withdrawn; and there he continued playing far into the night. When Boryna came in, supper was getting ready.

"Well, the Voyt's wife is brought to bed. Folk are swarming there so that Dominikova has to drive them off, they come in such crowds. Yagna, you must go and see her to-morrow."

"Instantly—I will go instantly!" she cried, excited and eager all at once.

"Very well; and I'll go with you."

"Ah! Perhaps to-morrow will do better." And she added, to explain her quick change of mind: "Yes, I should prefer going in the day-time. The snow is falling, it is dark, and you say there are so many people."

He acquiesced; all the more readily because the smith's wife and children entered the hut just then.

"Why, where is your goodman?"

"At Vola. The threshing-machine there is out of order, and the manor blacksmith cannot put it to rights."

"Somehow," Yagustynka observed, in tones full of significance, "somehow he goes very often to the manor now."

"Have ye any objection?"



"None in the world. I only note one thing and another, and watch to see what will come of it all."

Her words failed to set tongues wagging; no one cared to talk loud. Each spoke to his neighbour in drowsy whispers; all were heavy with sleep, of which they had had too little the night before. They supped, too, with but little relish, and looked (not without surprise) at Yagna, who was in high spirits, bustling about the room, pressing them to eat, even after they had laid down their spoons, bursting into laughter, no one knew why, and sitting down beside the girls and talking nonsense, to break off on a sudden and run out to the other lodgings . . . and return when she had got only as far as the passage. Truth is, she was racked with a fever of anguish and dread. The evening wore away sluggishly, wearily, whilst her longing to go out behind the hut—to the haystack—grew ever stronger and stronger. Yet she could not make up her mind to go. She feared to be seen—she feared to commit sin. She was putting forth all her power of self-control, and trembling with the agony of effort; her soul cried out for liberty like a chained-up dog; her heart was rent within her. No, no! she could not bear it! . . . Perhaps he was standing there . . . looking about for her . . . he might be prowling round the cabin. . . . Perhaps, hidden in the orchard, he was even then looking in at the window at her . . . and imploring . . . and pining away with sad desire! . . . Then she thought she would run out, but only for a minute . . . only to say one word, to tell him he must not come to her nor she to him, for it was a sin. . . . And now she was looking for her apron to put it on . . . and now she made for the door. . . . But there something caught hold of her by the nape of the neck, as it were, and pulled her back.—Yagustynka's eyes followed each of her movements, like a sleuth-hound.—Nastka too looked strangely at her.—And the old man too!—Did they know? had they found out anything? . . . "No, no; I will not go out to-day."

Lapa, barking outside the hut, roused her at last from the state of obsession she was in. The cabin was nearly

empty. Only Yagustynka sat there, dozing by the fireside. Her goodman, too, was standing at the window and looking out; for the dog barked more and more furiously.

"No doubt, Antek, no longer able to wait, had now . . ." She broke off in terror.

But only old Klemba stood there in the doorway. Behind him, shaking and stamping the snow off their clothes and boots, came Vinciorek, Gregory "the Lame," Michael Caban, Franek Bylitsa (Hanka's uncle), Valenty "the Wry-mouthed," and Joseph Vahnik!

Boryna marvelled much at this deputation, as it seemed to be, but said not a word, except to answer their greetings. He shook hands all round, bade them be seated on the benches he pushed forwards, and offered his snuff-box.

They all sat down in a row, and took a pinch, nothing loath; one sneezed, another blew his nose, a third wiped his eyes, the snuff being of first-class strength. . . . They then looked round them, and some spoke a few words—about the snowy weather, about hard times—while others assented with grunts and nods: all, however, approaching at leisure the object of their visit.

Boryna shifted uneasily on his bench, stared at them, and attempted by various means to draw them out and learn what they would have of him.

He failed. They sat there in a row, hoary-headed clean-shaven old men, nearly of an age, hale as yet, though bowed down by years and labour; ponderous as moss-grown boulders in the fields, rugged, tough-sinewed, ungainly, but hard-headed and shrewd, they fought shy of speaking before the time, and approached the matter in hand circuitously, as sagacious sheep-dogs do a flock they aim at driving through a gate.

At length, however, Klemba cleared his throat, expectorated, and said with a dignified mien:

"How long shall we hang back and beat about the bush? We come to know if ye are on our side or not."

"Without you we cannot decide aught."

"For ye are the first man amongst us all."



"And wisdom has been given you by our Lord."

"And though ye have no office, yet are ye the leader of us all."

"Also our common interests are at stake."

Each man had his say, and every one was so complimentary to Boryna that he turned red, held up his hands in deprecation, and exclaimed:

"Kind friends, I do not even know as yet what brings you hither!"

"Our forest! After Twelfth Night, they intend to cut it down."

"I know they even now saw timber at the mill."

"But that belongs to Jews in Rudka, as we thought ye knew."

"I did not: I have little time to go about and question folk."

"Yet ye were first to make complaint against the Squire?"

"Because I thought that he had sold the timber of our clearing."

"Why, whose else? say whose!" Caban interrupted.

"That on the land he bought himself; his own."

"Aye, but he also has sold the timber of Vilche Doly, and they are now to cut it down!"

"That he can only do if we agree!"

"And yet the trees are marked already; they have measured out the land, and will begin to fell the timber after Twelfth Night."

"If 'tis thus"—Boryna paused to reflect—"if so, then we shall enter a complaint before the commissary."

"From seed-time to harvest, complainant, thou starvest!" Caban muttered; and Valenty "the Wry-mouthed" chimed in:

"In dying condition, folk need no physician."

"A complaint will do this much: ere the official prohibition is issued, there will not remain a single stump of the wood—*our* wood.—Remember what they did at Debitsa!"

"The wolf that tastes a single lamb, with the whole flock its maw will cram.' The manor folk are like the wolf."

"This," Boryna said, "must be prevented."

"Matthias, these are words of wisdom. To-morrow, when mass is over, the farmers are to meet at my cabin and see what we should do; and they have sent to ask you to come over with good advice."

"Shall they all be there?"

"Yes, and just after mass."

"To-morrow?—What can I do?—You see, I must be to-morrow at Vola without fail. Kinsmen of mine are dividing land there, quarrelling and bringing actions one against another. I have promised to arbitrate there, so that the orphans shall suffer no wrong. So I must go; but I agree to stand by the meeting's decision."

They left the hut somewhat dissatisfied. He had approved them and agreed with all they said; but they had the impression he was not sincerely holding with them.

"You will decide as you choose," he was thinking; "I shall be clear of it. Neither the Voyt, nor the miller, nor any of the foremost men here follow you. . . . The Squire, if he knows I am not hostile to him, will compensate me more willingly for the cow; and he may come to an understanding with each of us separately.—They are foolish: it were better to let him cut the very last sapling down—and then go to law—lodge a complaint—get an injunction—and so wring out of him far more than he would have given by any agreement."

Long after everyone else was in bed, Matthias still sat up, poring over a board on which he had made calculations with chalk, and revolving many things in his mind.

The next day, immediately after breakfast, he ordered the sledge to be got ready.

"As I said last night, I am off to Vola. Yagna, take good care of the house; if anyone should ask after me, say I was obliged to go.—And do not forget to look in at the Voyt's."

"Will ye come home late?" she asked, concealing the joy she felt.

"About supper-time: perhaps later."

He put on his best suit, which she brought him from the



store-room. Instead of a button, she passed a ribbon through his shirt button-holes and tied it; she helped him to dress, and hurried Pete on, with feverish impatience to get the horses harnessed in a trice. She was all the time in rapid movement, and her heart cried out for gladness: her goodman would be absent for the whole day, and was to return late . . . perhaps only near midnight! While she would remain alone!—And at dusk—at dusk—she could go out—out behind the haystack! Aha! . . . She exulted in her soul; her eyes beamed with laughter, she stretched and drew herself up; shocks as of tingling and burning electric fluid went through her with most exquisitely sweet torment. . . . And then, all at once and unexpectedly, a strange feeling of dread took hold of her, and a dead hush came over her soul, and she looked on, as one dazed, at Boryna, as he put on his cap and gave his orders to Vitek.

"Oh, pray, pray, take me with you!" she whispered low.

"But—but," Boryna stammered in astonishment, "who will take your place at home?"

"Yet take me.—It is St. Stephen's feast to-day, and there is little to do. Take me; I feel so dejected here!" And she begged so hard that—much as he wondered at her whim—he made no further difficulties. A few minutes later, she was ready, and off they set from the hut, the sledge swaying and sweeping round with all the might of straining hocks and beating hoofs.

## CHAPTER VI

"I THOUGHT," he muttered sourly, "you'd been lost in some snow-drift!"

"In such a storm as this, how could I go faster? I had to grope my way along, for the snow blew in my eyes so, I could not keep them open; and it drives along the roads so thick that it hides everything two paces away."

"Your mother at home?"

"Surely; where else, in such villainous weather? She was at the Koziols, this morning. Magda is in a bad way, though, and like to go to the churchyard, 'the priest's cowbyre.'" So answered Yagna, shaking the snow from her clothes.

"Any gossip abroad?" he inquired, chaffing her.

"Go out and ask, and ye will know. I did not run thither to gossip."

"Do you know that the Squire is here?"

"Here? In such a storm it were hard to keep a dog out of doors; and he has freely chosen to come?"

"Who must, will go, even through storms of snow."

"Yes, who must." She smiled sceptically.

"He himself promised; no one asked him," Boryna answered sternly. Then he set aside a barrel hoop he was working at, and got up to look out at the window; but such a hurricane of snow filled the air, whirling and swirling outside, that neither trees nor fences were visible.

"I think the snow is not coming down any more," he added, more gently.

"No, it is only blown and swept about so, that one cannot see one's way," Yagna replied, warming her hands, and setting to wind the thread from a spindle on to a reel. Her husband, after again peeping out of the window, and listening with still greater impatience, took up his work.



"Yuzka—where is she?" he asked presently.

"Gone to Nastka's, no doubt; she is always there."

"The girl's a gadabout—never at home for the space of a 'pater.'"

"She says staying at home is wearisome."

"Wants to divert herself, the little chit!"

"No; to shirk her duties, rather."

"Can ye not forbid her?"

"I? Once I did; and was abused and railed at for my pains. Ye must give her orders yourself: mine are of no account."

To this complaint Boryna paid little attention; he was listening with extreme impatience. But no human voice was audible outside, only the gale blowing, roaring here and there, and smiting the walls till they vibrated and groaned again.

"Going out?" she asked.

He made no answer, hearing the front door open; and immediately Vitek ran in, out of breath, and crying out, as he entered:

"The Squire has come!"

"Only now? Shut the door, quick!"

"I can hear the jingling of his harness-bells still."

"Did he come alone?"

"I could only distinguish the horses, the air was so thick."

"Run this instant and find out where he has stopped."

"Shall ye go to him?" she asked, with bated breath.

"Not until he has asked to see me; I shall not invite myself. But without me he can do nothing."

There was a pause: Yagna winding up threads, counting them and making them into skeins, while her goodman, so impatient that he could not work any longer, laid the things down and was preparing to go out . . . when in bolted Vitek!

"The Squire is at the miller's, in his front room—and his horses stand in the yard."

"How have you dirtied yourself so?"

"The wind blew me into a snow-drift."

"Say rather you were fighting with other young rascals in the snow!"

"No, it was the wind!"

"Aye, aye: tear your clothes, do: you'll get such a beating from me as you'll remember!"

"But it's true what I say. It blows and blusters so, one can scarcely keep one's feet."

"Get away from the fire-place; you will warm yourself enough later.—Go to Pete, tell him to do some threshing; and you are to help him—not run about the village like a dog with its tongue lolling out."

"I go," he answered sulkily; "but I must first bring fire-wood, as mistress ordered me." He sorely wished to tell what he had seen in the village. Going out, he whistled to Lapa, but the dog, curled up by the fireside, paid no heed to him. Boryna, dressed to go, went about the cabin, poked the logs, peeped into the stable, looked out of the window, and waited with growing restlessness to be sent for; but no one came.

"He may have forgotten," Yagna hazarded.

"Forgotten?—Forgotten *me*?"

"Perhaps. Ye trust the blacksmith so, and he is such a liar."

"You are a fool. Speak not of what ye do not understand."

Offended, she became mute. He tried in vain to bring her round with kind words, and at last he too lost his temper, snatched up his cap and strode out, slamming the door.

Yagna, having supplied her distaff with flax, sat down by the window, and began to spin, with a glance from time to time at the tempest of snow that raged outside.

The wind howled deafeningly. Great clouds of powdery snow, as large as houses, torn and tattered and formless, were whisked about in every direction, and again and again broke upon the cabin walls, making every beam and rafter tremble, rattling the contents of the sideboard, and swinging to and fro Yuzka's "globes" and "stars" that dangled overhead.



A draught, piercingly cold, came in through the doors and windows, making Yagna throw her apron over her shoulders, and Lapa more than once shift his place for a warmer nook.

Vitek entered noiselessly, and said, not without hesitation:

"Mistress!"

"Well?"

"Do you know, the Squire has driven over with stallions! Carriage-horses they are, black as night, with red netting and plumes on their heads, and tinkling bells about their flanks; and they shine like the gildings in the church. And how they did fly past! Oh, faster far than the wind!"

"Of course.—They are not peasants' horses: they belong to the manor."

"O Lord! I never saw such wonderful beasts!"

"Could they be otherwise, with no field-work to do, and feeding on naught but oats?"

"Ye are right, mistress.—But should we feed our filly so, and dock her tail, and harness her together with the Voyt's mare, would they go as well as these?"

The dog started up in alarm, and barked.

"Someone is in the passage: see who it is."

But ere Vitek could do so, a man, crusted over with snow, appeared on the threshold, "praised God," beat his cap on the leg of his boot, and looked round the room.

"Pray let me breathe a space and warm myself here," he gasped.

"Be seated," she replied, in some confusion. "Vitek, put more logs on the fire."

The stranger sat down on the hearth, warmed himself, and lit a pipe.

"Is this the dwelling of Boryna—Matthias Boryna?" he asked, consulting a paper.

"It is," she answered, fearing she might have to do with someone of the police.

"Is your father at home?"

"My *husband* is gone to the village."

"Allow me to wait here a little, warming myself by the fire: I am quite frozen."

"You are welcome: neither bench nor fire will lose thereby."

He took off his sheepskin coat, but had evidently been chilled to the marrow, for he shivered all over, rubbed his hands, and drew nearer and nearer still to the fire.

"This year," he remarked, "we have a bitterly hard winter."

"Of a truth, it is not mild.—May I heat a little milk for you?"

"No, thanks; but I should like some tea."

"We had some not long since, in autumn, when my goodman had pains inside, and I got some from town for him; but it is all run out, and I cannot say where I could obtain any here."

"Why," Vitek put in, "his Reverence is drinking tea all day long."

"Would you run to him and borrow some?"

"No need. I have some by me—if you would give me some water. . . ."

"I shall boil some at once."

She placed a pot on the fire, and returned to her spinning, but spun no more; while she seemed to be twirling the spindle, she was scanning him with great curiosity.—Who could he be? what did he want? Was he a man of the police, making out some list? the paper he was always consulting seemed to point to that.—His apparel, too, was not of her class: grey and green, like the hunting-dress of a manor-house footman. . . . But again, he was wearing a peasant's sheepskin and cap!—He might possibly be an eccentric fellow, or perhaps a world-ranger.

Thus she pondered, exchanging glances with Vitek, who, apparently gazing into the fire, scrutinized the stranger, and was much surprised to hear him try and make friends with Lapa.

"Pray beware: that dog bites!" he could not help exclaiming.

"Fear naught!" he said, and, with a singular smile, he patted the dog's head, come to rest on his knees.



Presently Yuzka came in and, soon after, Vavrek's wife, and several other neighbours; for already the news had been spread abroad that a stranger had come to Boryna's hut.

But he continued warming himself, paying no attention to the people or their whispers and remarks. When the water in the pot boiled, he took some tea out of a piece of paper, poured the tea in, took a white mug down from the shelf, and drank the tea thus made, nibbling at a lump of sugar the while, and walking about the room, examining the pieces of furniture, or standing in the midst and eyeing the people with such sharp glances that they felt confused.

"Who made these?" he asked, pointing to the wafer "globes" that dangled from the ceiling.

"I did!" Yuzka sang out, turning very red.

He resumed his walk, Lapa following him step by step.

"And who did these paintings?" he inquired, stopping before a few of the cut-out figures that were on the picture-frames and the walls.

"They are not painted, but cut out of paper."

"You don't say so!" he exclaimed.

"I do, for I cut them out myself."

"And did you invent them?"

"Of course, but every child here can do as much."

He said nothing further, poured out some more tea, sat down by the fire again, and a pretty long silence ensued. The folk slunk away; night was coming on, and the storm had abated. At times an angry gust would still rush by, but at rarer intervals and with less fury, like a bird that a long flight has worn out.

At length, Yagna put her distaff aside, and began to prepare supper.

"Was one James Soha ever in your service?"

"Is it Kuba you mean?—Aye, he was, but he died last autumn, poor man!"

"Your parish priest has told me so.—Lord God! I have been seeking him for ever so long in all the villages around, and find him dead!"

"Have you sought for our Kuba?" cried Vitek, greatly

touched. "Then ye are surely brother to the Squire of Vola."

"How do you know that?"

"People have often told me his brother was back from a far-off land, and seeking a certain Kuba in all the countryside: but no one could tell who that Kuba was."

"Soha was his other name; I learned only to-day that he was dead, and had been in your service."

"Yes," Vitek sobbed; "he was shot, and died—died of loss of blood!"

"Was he long with you?"

"Ever since I can remember."

"An honest fellow, I suppose?" he asked hesitatingly.

"Oh, the whole village will tell you how honest he was: all wept at his funeral, all, even his Reverence, who would take no money for the burying.—He taught me my prayers, and how to use a gun, and was like a father to me. . . . Sometimes, too, he would give me a five-kopek bit.—Religious he was, and a quiet man, a hard worker, and one that his Reverence has praised many a time."

"Is he buried in your churchyard?"

"Where else should he be?" Vitek returned. "I know the place; Ambrose set up a cross there, and Roch wrote about him on it. Even were it covered with snow, I could find it for you."

"Then let's start at once, to get there ere nightfall."

The stranger put his sheepskin on, and stood there in a brown study for a time. A man of many years, somewhat stooping, grey-haired and withered. His rugged face had a clayey tint, with a deep scar in one cheek from a bullet, and another, long and fiery, on his brow. His nose was long, his beard tufted and scanty, his eyes dark, deep-sunk and glowing; a pipe was always in his mouth, and he was always refilling it.—Waking up at last from his reverie, he bethought himself of offering money to Yagna, who put her hands behind her back, and flushed crimson.

"Pray take it: nothing in the world is given for nothing."

"In the world, that may be the fashion," she retorted,



with wounded pride. "Am I a Jewess or a trader, to take money for a little fire and water?"

"Well, God reward your hospitality! Tell your husband that Yacek from Vola has been here: he will remember me. I shall be here again some day, but am now in haste, for night is near. God be with you!"

"And with you also!"

She would have kissed his hand, but he snatched it away, and hurried out of the cabin.

The darkness was coming down slowly over the land. The great gale had gone down, but from the hillocks of drifted snow that lay across the road, there blew a dry powdery dust, like flour shaken out of a cloth. Above, all was now tranquil: huts and gardens came clear and distinct out of the livid blur of the uprising dusk.

The village, lethargic during the blizzard, had started up; the ways were full of passers-by, the gardens of voices; here and there they were clearing away snow from before the huts, or cutting holes in the ice and carrying water from the pond; gates were opening and a few sledges ploughing their way through the snow. Crows—an infallible sign that the weather was about to change—appeared, hopping about the huts.

Mr. Yacek gazed round him with interest, asking at times about the people they met or the huts they passed by, and walked so fast that Vitek could scarcely keep pace with him. Lapa ran on in front, barking gaily.

In front of the church, the snow was piled up in such great masses that it went over the fence completely, and was as high as the boughs of the trees. They were accordingly compelled to go round the priest's dwelling-house, outside of which a troop of urchins were running to and fro, shouting and snow-balling each other. Lapa barked at them; one boy caught it by the neck and threw it into a feathery steamy drift. Vitek rushed to the rescue, but they pelted him so hard, he could scarcely get away; and, having retaliated as best he could, he ran to rejoin Mr. Yacek, who had not waited for him.

With difficulty they plodded through as far as the burying-ground. Here, too, the snow was often as high as a man, and the black arms of the crosses were only just above the surface of the white mounds that covered the graves. The place was somewhat exposed and there was some wind here. Now and then, wafting the powdery snow hither and thither, it hid all things from sight, except the naked trees waving their shattered branches and looming with dark trunks through the cloudy veil. All the fields around were one plain of pure white; and just beyond the churchyard, hard upon a score of people could be seen going along the deeply covered road, bending forward under very heavy burdens that they bore. When the wreaths that hid them now and then were swept away, and the wind fell, women's red petticoats were seen clear and distinct, straggling units on the plain.

"Who are these? Are they returning from some fair?"

"No, they are *komorniki*,<sup>1</sup> and have been to the forest to get firewood."

"What, are they carrying it on their backs?"

"Surely. As they have no horses, their shoulders must bear the load."

"Many such in the village?"

"Not a few. Only the *gospodarze* have land; the others live in lodgings, and go out to work, or take service on farms."

"Do they often go out to fetch firing?"

"The manor allows them to come twice a week with bill-hooks and take as much dry wood as they can break off and carry in their bundles. The *gospodarze* alone have the right to go to the forest with a cart, and use an ax on the trees. . . . We have often and often, Kuba and I, gone there together, and come back with a splendid tree in the cart!

<sup>1</sup> Peasants form two classes: the *gospodarze*, or landowners, who have at least a hut and enclosure of their own; and *komorniki*, or lodgers, who must work even for the lodgings they occupy. These are very poor, and looked down upon by the others.—*Translator's Note.*



Kuba knew well how to fell a hornbeam, and conceal it so amongst the firewood faggots that even the keeper never caught him," he said, not without pride.

"Was he long in pain? Tell me all."

This Vitek did, nothing loath, Mr. Yacek putting some questions to him from time to time, now stopping short, gesticulating and exclaiming aloud. The lad thought his manner strange, could not make out what he meant, and was beginning to feel terror besides: it was getting so dark; the whole churchyard looked as though clad in a huge shroud, and murmuring with eerie voices. So he ran on in front and, with eyes starting from their sockets, looked about for the cross that marked Kuba's grave. At last he found it, close to the fence, and near the scattered tombs of those slain in the insurrection—"the War"—where he had prayed on All Souls' Day.

"Here it is, and the name, written on the cross: James Soha."—He spelt it out, following every one of the great white letters with his finger. "Yes, Roch wrote that, and Ambrose made the cross."

Mr. Yacek gave him a couple of *zloty*, and bade him run home. So he did, and scampered away, but stopped once to whistle for Lapa, and glance back to see what the stranger was about.

"Lord! The brother to the Squire, kneeling at Kuba's grave!" he ejaculated, stupefied. But night was coming on fast, and the trees, bending down over him, shook their heads in a weird way; so he went back to the village at a run, and by a short cut; only stopping near the church to take breath and look at the money he had safe in his closed fist. The dog caught up with him, and they went back at leisure to the cabin.

Close to the pond he met Antek, returning from his work. The dog rushed to fawn on him, whined with delight and barked, and Antek caressed it kindly.

"Good dog! good dog!—Whence come you, Vitek?"

He told him of all, omitting the money given.

"Come one of these days and see my children."

"Yes, yes; I have made a cart for little Peter, and another funny figure besides."

"Do not forget to bring them.—And here is something for yourself."

"I'll come this very day, but first I must see if master is home yet."

"Is he out?" Antek inquired, with poorly assumed indifference.

"At the miller's, taking counsel with the Squire and a few more."

"Mistress at home?" he asked, lowering his voice.

"Aye: busy at work. I'll just look in there and be back."

"Yes, come to us!" he said, and would have made more inquiries; but, though it was late, people were still about; moreover, the boy, a feather-headed fellow, might blab and let things out. So he walked on swiftly, looking round when near the church to see if he was watched, and then turned aside, taking a path that ran by the granaries. Vitek meanwhile made for the cabin.

Boryna had not come yet: the family room was in shadow, save for the brands which glowed dully on the hearth. Yagna was preparing the evening meal, and in evil humour; for Yuzka had gone off again somewhere, and there was so much to do, one did not know what to begin first. She gave no heed to what Vitek said, until he mentioned Antek's name; it arrested her attention and she paused in her work.

"Tell no one that he gave you money!"

"Since mistress forbids me, I'll not breathe a word of it!"

"Here are five kopeks more, for you to remember.—Did he go home?"

Without waiting for an answer, she suddenly ran out into the porch, calling for Pete, whilst she peered into the orchard and court-yard, with searching, yet frightened glances. She even went out to look beyond the shed and about the haystack. No one was there. . . . This quieted her, but also tried her patience. She rated Yuzka for not having given the cows their drink, and for her continual



idleness; to which the little girl, being bold and fierce and by no means tongue-tied, was not slow to answer back. And they had a quarrel, each saying very sharp things.

"Gabble, gabble your fill! your father is coming, and his strap will silence you!" she threatened her, lighting the lamp, and taking up her spinning again. Yuzka went on grumbling, but no one replied to her; Yagna had just heard, she thought, someone passing outside the corner window.

"Vitek, look outside; I think that one of our swine has got out of the sty and is in the orchard now."

But he assured her he had driven them all in and made the door fast. Yuzka went to the other side of the hut and brought tubs, Pete helping her, for the cows to drink from; then she ran for the milking-pails.

"I myself shall milk them; after so much labour, ye need rest."

"Yes, milk them, do! Once more ye will leave the udders half full!" Yuzka snapped at her.

"Hold your peace, you had best!" she cried in a fury, as she put her clogs on, tucked up her petticoat, and went to the cow-shed with a couple of pails.

Night had fallen, the wind was hushed, the white snow-mist settling down. But the sky above hung black, starless, packed close with small low-lying clouds; the fields loomed a dark grey; an oppressive lull prevailed everywhere. Not a voice was heard in the village, nor any sound but the hammers, beating, clinking, clinking, beating, on the anvil in the forge.

In the byre it was close and dark; the kine were drinking the water, and noisily licking, with muffled gurgles, the bottom of the tubs as they emptied them.

Yagna groped and found the milking-stool, sat down by the first cow in the row, felt her udder, wiped it clean, and, propping her head against the animal's flanks, began her work.

The milk spurted rhythmically into the resounding pail; the hoofs of the horses pawed in the adjoining stable; from

the cabin, muffled, yet audible, came the noise of Yuzka's chattering.

"Aye, she babbles and babbles, but does not peel the potatoes!" Yagna muttered, bending a most attentive ear; for now the snow outside was crackling under—it seemed to her—the steps of someone coming from the shed. . . . They stopped . . . all was still again . . . they approached—the snow crackled louder.—Turning her head toward the glimmering outlines of the open door, she saw a figure dimly silhouetted there.

"Pete!" she cried.

"Hush, Yagna, hush!"

"Antek!"

Motionless, palsy-stricken at the sight and words, she could not articulate one syllable, nor even think. Instinctively she went on milking, but the milk squirted on to her petticoat, or fell on the ground. A fit of fever had seized upon her; a gust, as it were, of fiery flame swept through all her being, flashing lightnings before her eyes, tearing at her heart-strings with delicious pain. And then something caught her and throttled her so, she had like to fall dead on the spot.

"Ever since Yule-tide," he whispered, "I have been as a watch-dog, waiting and watching for you, there, by the haystack . . . and you did not come once."

That voice of his! Strangled, passionate, flaming with love, it overwhelmed her with the might of its clamorous outcry to her heart, and of the sweet irresistible fire it bore. He stood facing her, leaning (as she could feel) against the cow's flank, bending down and gazing upon her—so near that she could feel his hot breath upon her brow.

"Do not fear me, Yagna. No one has seen; fear nothing . . . I could bear it no longer, it was impossible: day and night and always, you stand before mine eyes, Yagna.—Will you not say one word?"

"What—what can I say?" she faltered tearfully.

Then they both were silent. Emotion made them mute, and the very closeness of one to the other, the very solitude



in common that they had so much desired, now took all power from them, and weighed them down—a burden delightful indeed, but fearful as well. They were irresistibly drawn to each other, and yet it was now so hard to bring out a single word! Their desire was mutual, and yet neither could stretch forth a hand!

The cow, swishing her tail as she drank, struck him more than once in the face, until he caught it in a firm grasp. Then he bent down over Yagna still lower, and whispered again:

"Sleep I cannot—nor eat—nor do aught without you, O Yagna!"

"Things are not easy for me either."

"Yagna! did you ever think of me at all?"

"Was I able not to think? You arise in my thoughts always . . . I know no longer what to do.—Is it true that ye did smite Matthew?"

"It is. He lied, slandering you: I have stopped his mouth. . . . And I will deal likewise with anyone who does so."

The cabin-door slammed: someone came out into the yard at a run, straight for the cow-house. Antek had but just time to leap the manger and crouch there.

"Yuzka ordered me to take the tubs back; we must get the food ready for the swine," said Vitek.

"Take—take them all!" she answered, huskily.

"Nay; Lysula has not finished hers yet; I shall return for it." He hurried away, and they heard him bang the house-door.

Antek emerged from his hiding-place.

"He is coming back, that imp! I shall go to the haystack and wait. . . . Will you come to me, Yagna?"

"I fear . . ."

"Come, oh, come . . . if but for an hour or so.—I shall wait for you," he entreated.

He came behind her, still sitting beside the cow, threw an arm round her breast in a strong embrace, bent her head back and kissed her mouth with so powerful an intake of

the breath, that she herself could not breathe. Her arms fell to her sides, the pail rolled along the ground. But, straining up towards him, she kissed him back with such wild vehemence that they both closed as in a death-grapple; each fell into the other's arms; and so they remained awhile locked in that one mad, frenzied, delirious kiss.

At last he tore himself away, and slunk out of the byre.

She would now have sprung after him, but he was on the threshold and vanished like a shadow into the night. Yet still she could hear his muffled whisper, and it wrought on her senses with such fiery and commanding power that she looked around, astounded to see him no more. No, he was not there—only the kine, chewing the cud and whisking their tails. She looked out into the yard, where—beyond that threshold—reigned night impenetrable, and silence was lord, save where the forge-hammers beat and clinked afar.—But he *had* been there, had stood by her side, had hugged, had kissed her. Her lips were yet burning, the flame was running through her still, and an unuttered shout of gladness echoed within her heart.—“Antek!” she cried aloud; and the sound of her own voice brought her partly back to her senses.—She set to milking as fast as she could, but was so dazed that she more than once sought the udder between the beast's forelegs, and was so beside herself with gladness that she never knew her face was wet with tears till, as she returned to the cabin, the cold air blew on her cheeks. She brought the milk, but forgot to strain it out, and ran round to the other side of the hut under the impression that she had something urgent to do. . . . What it was, she could not remember: the one thought that filled her mind was that Antek waited for her by the hayrick. She took a few steps about the room, threw her apron over her head . . . and went out.

Very quickly did she round the hut, gliding along outside the windows, to the narrow passage between orchard and shed, which was nearly roofed over with drooping snow-laden branches that bent so low, she had to stoop down as she passed.



Antek awaited her by the stile; he leaped forward, ravenous as a wolf, and half carried, half dragged her to the rick near the roadside.

But that day they were doomed to disappointment. They had scarce got into the rick and joined lips in a kiss, when, stern and loud, Boryna's voice resounded.

"Yagna! Yagna!"

They sprang apart, as if struck with lightning. Antek darted away, and ran crouching along the fence; Yagna hastened back to the court-yard. The boughs had torn her apron off her head, and she was covered all over with snow; but this she did not remark. She rubbed her face with snow, took up an armful of firewood from the shed, and walked deliberately into the cabin.

Old Boryna eyed her askance and somewhat strangely.

"I went to see about Sivula; she is lying down and lowing."

"But where have ye got covered with so much snow?"

"Where?—Oh, there's a lot of it hanging like beards down from the eaves; if you do but touch them, down they come!" She gave the explanation jauntily, but turned her face away from the fire, lest he should see her flaming cheeks.

But she could not hoodwink Boryna. Without looking her straight in the face, he could perceive very well that she was blushing crimson, and that her eyes glowed feverishly. A sort of vague uncertain suspicion crept into his mind, and his jealousy snarled and crouched within him, like a dog ready to bite. He pondered and thought very long, and at last concluded that Matthew must have met her and pushed her against the fence.

Nastka coming in just then, he thought he would get her to speak.

"Ah! What have I heard?—Your Matthew is well and up by now, as it seems?"

"Well and up, indeed? Alas!"

"Someone told me he had met him in the village this evening."

"'Tis all mere talk. Matthew can hardly move, certainly not rise from his bed. He spits no more blood, though; Ambrose cupped him to-day, and prepared him a drink—lard melted in strong vodka—and they are both taking the medicine together so heartily that one can hear their songs from the road!"

The old man put no more questions, but remained suspicious.

Yagna, tired of the moody silence, and abashed by his fixed prying stare, related to him every detail of Mr. Yacek's visit.

He was greatly amazed; and, at a loss to conceive what it meant, he took no small pains to find out, pondering every word. He finally decided that the Squire had sent Mr. Yacek to make sure what the Lipka folk thought about the matter of the clearing.

"But he never so much as asked one word about the forest!"

"When such a one begins, he leads you on and on, as with a rope, and you know neither when nor how, but you tell him all. Well do I know that brood of manor-folk!"

"He asked only about Kuba and the figures stuck upon the wall."

"To find the road, he walks along a side-path.' Yes, in all this there is some trick or other of the manor-folk. What? the brother of the Squire troubling about Kuba? 'Tis true, this Yacek is, they say, not quite sound of mind—always wandering about the villages, playing his violin where holy figures stand, and talking senseless talk.—Did he say he would come again?"

"He did, and asked about you."

"Well, well, this is beyond me."

"And had you a talk with the Squire?" she asked him pleasantly, wishing to turn his mind away from what had just occurred.

He winced, as though stung in some most tender part.

"No. I was at Simon's." And he said no more.

So they sat together in gloomy silence until supper-time,



when Roch came in. He sat down by the fire, according to custom, but would not eat. When they had done, he said, in a low tone:

"I have not come here for myself. They tell me, the Squire is deeply offended with the Lipka folk and will not employ one peasant of the village to hew down his trees. I have come to ask if this is the truth."

"In God's name, my man, how should I know? It is news to me!"

"But a council was held at the miller's to-day; the news has come thence."

"The Voyt, the miller, and the smith were there: not I."

"How so? They tell me that the Squire was here to-day to see you, and you went out with him."

"I have not seen him, and I speak the truth: believe me or not, as you choose."

But how this truth had stung him, and the fact that he had been slighted had stung him, he did not say.

The very thought exasperated him; he held his tongue nevertheless, ruminating over the bitter grievance, and controlling himself with a great effort, lest Roch should guess at what he felt.

How now? He had been waiting, *he!* and they had held their council, and left him out of it! That he would not pass over.—A nobody in their eyes, he would show he was somebody in the village. . . . It was the miller's doing: he had made a fortune by wronging the people, and was now above everyone. That cheat! of whom he knew enough to send the fellow to prison! . . . And the Voyt, forsooth! one fit rather to feed cattle than command his betters—a vile drunkard, whose office, if they only elected him, Ambrose might take, and fill it as well as he! . . . The blacksmith too, his pestilential son-in-law! Let the brute but come again to Boryna's cabin! . . . And then the Squire—that wolf, always prowling and sniffing round to snatch what he could from the people! A noble, dwelling on the peasants' lands, selling the peasants' forests, living but by the peasants' sufferance; and he durst come there to plot

against them! Could not the wretch understand that a flail would strike as hard on a noble's back as on anyone else's?—However, he let none of these thoughts escape him in words. They pained him exceedingly, they tortured him; but that was his business and no one else's. And, remembering presently that such silent brooding in the presence of a guest was unseemly, he rose and said:

"Ye bring strange news; but if the Squire be resolved and will not change his mind, I see no means of forcing him."

"True; yet if some honourable man were to set before him the harm the people would suffer thereby, he might decide otherwise."

"I," Boryna exclaimed tartly, "will by no means intercede!"

"But consider: there are a score of *Komorniki* here, all eager for work to do. Ye know them, and know how severe this winter is. Some have their stock of potatoes frozen, and are out of work. Ere spring comes, the misery among them will be frightful. Even now, many families have only once a day warm food to eat. They all reckoned that, when the Squire had his trees in Vilche Doly felled, there would be work enough for everyone. And now it is said that he has vowed he would not take one man from Lipka, being angered because they brought a complaint against him to the commissioner."

"That I signed myself; and I will stand by it. He shall not fell one sapling without our consent."

"If so, then he will perchance not fell any trees."

"None, at least, on our land."

"But," Roch faltered, "what will become of those poor men?"

"I cannot help their fate, nor give up our rights that they may work for him. I may stand up to defend others from wrong; but when I am wronged, who will be on my side? My dog, perhaps?"

"Then I see ye are not a friend of the manor."

"A friend of myself—and of justice. Of naught besides."



And I have other matters to think upon. If Voytek or Bartek has no food to eat—that is the priest's affair, not mine! With the best will, I cannot alone provide for all."

"But help to provide . . . and help not a little," Roch replied, sadly.

"Try carrying water in a sieve: how much will ye bring in? 'Tis even so with poverty.—And to me it seems a divine ordinance that some should have possessions, and others only the air they breathe."

Roch bowed his head and went out, much grieved. He had expected less harshness towards human sufferings from Boryna. The latter saw him to the gate, and—as customary with him—went round to give a last look at the cows and horses ere going to bed.

Yagna, murmuring her evening prayer, was beating up the contents of the feather-bed she was making, when Matthias, coming in, cast a piece of cloth at her feet.

"Ye lost your apron: I found it by the stile!" he said, very quietly, but with such harsh emphasis and a look so keen and searching that she was petrified with fear, and it was some seconds before she could stammer out some words to explain things.

"'Twas . . . 'twas that Lapa. . . . Mischievous brute! . . . always making off with something . . . took my clogs to his kennel the other day.—Always up to some mischief!"

"Lapa?—I see.—Aye, aye," he muttered with grim irony, positive that she had lied to him.

## CHAPTER VII

ON Twelfth Night, which that year fell on a Monday, the folk were slowly filing out of church, even before Vespers were over. For they heard from the tavern the music and singing, and made their way towards the inviting sounds. It was now that, for the first time since Advent, music was permitted; now, too, that Margaret Klemba and Vincent Soha celebrated their betrothal. The latter, though bearing the same name as the deceased Kuba, denied any relationship with him, being of those who pride themselves on their acres alone.

Also, it was whispered that Staho Ploshka (who had since the potato-harvest been making up to Ulisia, the Soltys' daughter) would surely that evening come to the point and settle everything with her father over a bottle. The latter was known to have objected to the match, not wishing for a son-in-law such a quarrelsome fellow, fickle besides, never on good terms with his parents, and demanding either four whole acres of land or two thousand *zloty* in cash and a couple of cows into the bargain, as Ulisia's dowry.

That day, too, was the christening at the Voyt's; and though the festivities were to be held at home, most who knew him expected that, as soon as the company should be in convivial mood, he would adjourn to the tavern and stand them drinks there all round.

Besides these attractions, there were also greater and more serious matters, which concerned all the people equally.

They had, as it happened, learned after High Mass from the people of the other hamlets that the Squire had already engaged all the hands he needed at the clearing: ten from Rudka, from Modlitsa fifteen, about eight from Debitsa,



and of the "nobility" of Rzepki<sup>1</sup> hard upon a score; from Lipka, not one single man. It was a fact, for the forester had been at High Mass, and had told them so.

The poor were in consternation.

There were indeed in Lipka a great many wealthy families. And there were others, too, not so well off, but to whom this mode of earning money did not appeal. And others, again, though in distress, would never own to it, in order to keep up appearances and friendly relations with the wealthy men with whom they invariably held.—But there were also the *Komorniki*, and such as possessed only a hovel to live in. Of these, some worked on the farmers' threshing-floors, some wielded axes at the saw-mill, some did any work that came to hand, and (with the help of the Lord) scraped together enough to live upon. And, besides these, there were still five families that could get no work at all in the village: these had been looking forward to tide the winter over by work done on the clearing.

What were they to do now?

The winter was terrible. Few of them had any savings; some had even finished their stock of potatoes, and starvation was staring them in the face. They had to wait till spring, with no help in sight: small wonder, then, that they were sorely troubled in mind. They assembled in their huts to discuss matters, and in the end came to Klemba in a body, begging him to go with them to his Reverence, and seek his advice. Klemba excused himself, pretexting his daughter's betrothal. Others whom they tried shirked the troublesome duty, wriggling out of it like eels, and caring only for themselves and their own profit. This enraged Bartek (him of the saw-mill), who, though he had work, was always on the side of the poor. He therefore took with him Philip, who

<sup>1</sup> Here and there in Poland, one finds villages whose inhabitants hold aloof from the other peasants, and keep strictly to themselves; types very different from the others; haughty, reserved, and generally very poor. In old days, their forefathers were ennobled and grants of land were made to them for distinguished military service; and these are the remnants of their posterity.—*Translator's Note.*

lived over the water, Staho (old Bylitsa's son-in-law), and Bartek Koziol and Valek the Wry-mouthed: with these four he went to beg his Reverence to plead for them with the Squire.

They were closeted with him a considerable time, and only after Vespers did Ambrose hurry to tell Kobus that they were in conference with the priest, and would come over to the tavern.

Evening was falling meanwhile; the last fires of sundown were burnt out in the west, save for a few grey ashes that glimmered red like dying brands; and the country-side was slowly being wrapped in the mantle of the night. No moon was up as yet, but from the hard-frozen snow some chill icy gleams were reflected, making things appear as if shrouded in a winding-sheet. Stars peeped forth from the overhanging darkness—specks that swelled and shrank tremulously in the deep space, and shone bright with sparkling reflections on the snow. And the frost grew so bitter that men's ears tingled and the slightest noise seemed to echo over all the land.

But in the huts the fires blazed, and folk went busily about their evening duties: when in the yard and the enclosures, they bustled with furious haste, the frost burning their faces like a hot iron and strangling the very breath within them; but all was very quiet in the streets and lanes.

Not in the tavern, however. Here the musicians made a joyful noise, ever louder and louder. People were there, come from almost every hut: some to look about them, some (whom neither betrothals nor serious affairs interested) allured by the scent of the vodka. Women to whom solitude at home was irksome, and girls fond of romping with boys and hearing the band play, had slipped away stealthily before the gloaming, ostensibly to take the men home with them; but they stayed on themselves. Children too, especially boys in their teens, had followed their fathers; whistling to one another about the messuages, they had gathered in groups, loitering inside and outside the tavern porch, in spite of the cruel frost which bit them.

The tavern was well crowded. A big fire roared up the



chimney, flooding half the public room with blood-red light. Each man, on entering, stamped to clean his boots on the hearth, warmed his numbed hands, and then went to seek his own set in the throng: no very easy matter, for, notwithstanding the fire and the lamp hung over the bar, it was dark enough in the corners. In one of these the musicians sat, playing only now and then, and not very willingly: the dances had not properly begun yet, though an impatient couple or two were already whirling round and round.

The walls were lined with people, sitting at tables all along them, and in separate companies. But few of these drank much; they conferred together, and looked with a wistful eye on all who came in.

There was most noise about the bar, where Klemba's invited guests and Soha's kinsmen were standing; but even these were for the most part talking, and behaving with great propriety, as was the right thing at betrothals.

Many darted furtive glances towards the window, where about fifteen men of Rzepki were sitting at table; they had come before any, and still kept their places. No one insulted them, but no one showed them goodwill either, except Ambrose, who made friends with them at once, drank much vodka, and told them as strange stories as they could swallow. Close by stood Bartek of the saw-mill, with his friends, telling them what his Reverence had said, and inveighing loudly against the Squire. He was noisily supported by Voytek Kobus, a wiry little man, so fierce that he was all the time banging his fists on the table and boiling over with rage. This he did on purpose, guessing that the Rzepki men there present were going to fell the trees next day. Not one of them, however, took up his provocation, but they talked among themselves as if they had heard nothing.

Nor did any of the *gospodarze* there take it much to heart that his Reverence had been unwilling to plead for them with the Squire. On the contrary, the more noise the others made, the more these avoided them, turning away among the crowd. This was not difficult, the throng being so thick and making so much din that each man could, at his ease and regard-

less of his neighbours, choose the society he preferred. Only Yagustynka passed from group to group, here with a word of mockery, there with a merry jest, or whispering low some bit of gossip—but always attentive to go where bottles passed round and glasses clinked.

After a time, and by slow degrees, the people's fancy turned to merry-making. The noise had by now become an uproar, the glasses jingled oftener, the door opened incessantly to let new guests in. At last the musicians, being well plied with liquor by Klemba, struck up a brilliant mazur; and Soha, with his Margaret, led off, followed by as many couples as cared to dance.

These were not many in number. Most of the folk, seeing the first dancers in the place—Ploshka, Stach, Vahnik, the Voyt's brother, and many more—sitting and talking in nooks and corners, preferred to hold joyous converse together, or to jeer, half aloud, at the "nobility" of Rzepki, to whom Ambrose was constantly paying court.

Then Matthew appeared, leaning on a stick, drawn from his bed for the first time by his longing for society. He at once ordered vodka boiled with honey, took a seat by the fireside, and set to drinking and joking with his acquaintances. Suddenly he stopped. Antek was standing in the doorway; who, seeing him, drew himself up proudly and, after shooting one glance at the man, would have passed on as if he did not exist.

But Matthew exclaimed excitedly:

"Boryna! come hither to me!"

"Come ye yourself, if ye have aught to say," was Antek's curt reply: he thought the other meant to attack him.

"I would; but I cannot walk yet without a stick."

Antek, mistrusting him, passed on with an ominous frown; but Matthew caught him by the arm, and made him sit down at his side.

"Seat yourself here.—You have shamed me before all men; you have beaten me so, they had to call the priest in! But I bear you no grudge, fellow, and come first with words of peace.—Here, drink with me, boy! No man had ever



beaten me, and I thought no man could.—Wondrously strong you are, truly!—To toss up a man like me as a truss of straw . . . good heavens!”

“Ye were ever harrying me as I worked. . . . And then ye let out foul speech: it made me furious, I knew not what I did.”

“Yes, you speak true, and I confess it: not from fear, but with a willing mind.—But how ye did clapperclaw me! Why, I lost my best blood, and have many a rib broken. . . . Well, to you, Antek, I drink.—What, man! forgive and let hate die! I, too, forget all . . . as well as my shoulders will let me! . . . But are you indeed stronger than Vavrek of Volat?”

“Did I not, on Indulgence Day, last harvest-time, thrash him so that I hear he is not well yet?”

“Vavrek! They told me that, but I would not believe it. . . . Here, you Jew! Rum! And ‘essence’ to flavour it this instant, or I trounce you soundly!”

“But . . . ye vaunted of something in public,” Antek said, lowering his voice; “surely it was not true?”

“Nay, I spoke out of spite and at random. Nay, how could that be true?”—But, as he made this denial, he held the bottle to the light, looking through, lest Antek should read the truth in his eyes.

They drank once, then once more; then it was Antek’s turn to stand treat, and they emptied their glasses anew. And so they sat, quite as brothers, and on such friendly terms that all in the tavern were amazed. Matthew, who had taken more than a drop too much, yelled to the musicians to play faster, stamped and roared with laughter, and then spoke in Antek’s ear.

“So much is true: I did long for her to be mine; but she scratched me so, I was like one dragged face down through the brambles. Yes, she preferred you, I know it well; and even had she not, she would never have cared for me. ’Tis hard to lead an ox against its will. And I was sorely, how sorely! stung with jealousy. The girl is wonderfully

fair—none fairer in the world. But how she ever could marry that old man—and to your hurt—I cannot think!”

“To my hurt? Aye, and for my perdition too!” Antek began, but stopped short. Here his memory kindled within him such a flame that he muttered an inaudible oath, and said no more.

“Peace, lest tale-bearers hear you!”

“What have I said?”

“Nothing that I could hear; but others might.”

“It is unbearable—my heart is torn asunder!”

“I tell you: while ye can, get the better of it!” he said, cunningly striving to win his confidence little by little.

“Can I do so? Since love, far worse than sickness, burns in the bones, festers in the heart, and fills me with such craving, I can neither eat nor work nor sleep, and would like to dash my brains out to rid me of my life!”

“Oh, I know all about that. Lord, how I once ran after Yagna!—But when love comes, there is one thing to be done: marry, and it will at once pass away and vanish. If one cannot have the wife, why, then, the sweetheart: and immediately desire will be quenched, and love will die. I tell you the truth, and am not without experience,” he added, with pride.

“And what,” Antek asked, sadly, “what if it shall not pass even then?”

“That,” he returned scornfully, “is the lot of none but those that sigh in groves, and lurk round corners, and tremble to hear a petticoat rustle!”

“What you have said is true,” Antek replied, in deep thought.

“Come, man, drink to me: my throat is dry even to the bottom thereof.—The foul fiend take all women! Such a one, so weak you could fell her with a breath, will lead the strongest man as a calf led with a rope, rob him of strength and reason, and make him a laughing-stock to all! She-devils they are, every one of them, and the spawn of Satan, I tell you!—Now, drink to me!”



"Here's to you, brother!"

"God bless you!—I say, a fig for all that devil's spawn! . . . But ye know what they are, well enough."

They went on drinking and talking. Antek was somewhat flustered; and never having had one to whom he could tell his sorrow, he now felt a burning desire to make a clean breast of it. And though he refrained and controlled himself, he dropped a significant word or two here and there; these, though he gave no sign, Matthew noted well.

And now the fun in the tavern was growing to its height. The band worked away with might and main. One dance followed another; drink was quaffed at every table; all raised their voices, often in dispute, so that the public room resounded with the hubbub; and the feet of the dancers drummed on the floor like the beating of flails.

Klemba and his party now adjourned to the private room, and there too the noise was no trifle; but Soha continued dancing furiously with his Margaret, and at times went out with her into the open air, with their arms round each other's waists.

Bartek of the saw-mill and his people, who still stood where they had been before, were now at their second bottle, with Voytek Kobus shouting insults into the ears of the Rzepki Folk.

"Nobles in rags and tags, with naught but bundles and bags!"

"With but a couple of kine, the common property of the whole village!" another screamed.

"Long lousy locks warrant well-born wights!"

"See them, the Jews' hirelings!"

"Let them be leashed with the manor hounds! Both scent a good thing from afar!"

"What they scented, they now have got!"

"They come to snatch away the work that is our due!"

"The good-for-nothing vagabonds! They come because the Jews would hire them no more."

To these shouts some added gestures, shaking their fists

and pressing forward in full cry; and they were soon surrounded by a ring of angry peasants in liquor. But they said not a word, and sat close together, with their sticks clenched in their hands, drinking only beer, munching the sausages they had brought with them, and eyeing the peasants with a bold undaunted stare.

A fight would perhaps have taken place, but that Klemba now came upon the scene, soothing, beseeching, explaining matters; and the older men, and Ambrose with them, spoke in the same sense. At last Kobus ceased to taunt them, and the others were taken away to the bar for a drink. The band played a tune, and Ambrose set to telling them the most incredible tales—about the wars, and Napoleon, and Kosciuszko—and funny things that made them almost split their sides with laughter.

And presently Klemba's party poured out of the private room, coming in a body to join in the dance; which increased the uproar to such an extent that no voice could any more be distinguished in the universal clamour.

Heated with liquor, they waxed merrier and yet merrier, the young people capering and footing it lustily, while their elders huddled together where they could, hustled and driven back by the dancers, who whirled round in a constantly expanding circle.

The band played enthusiastically now, and the dances went on with a lively swing, though the partners were so many, there was scarce room to turn; they pushed and shoved one another, laughing and shouting gaily, making the floor groan, and the bar with the glasses and bottles jingle to their tread.

In short, it was a splendid festival, in which everyone was taking his fair share.

Winter was now at its height. Those weary arms that had so long delved the ground, were resting now; those forms once bowed, bowed down no longer: all were equal in freedom and repose, and the blithe thought that each enjoyed his own separate and distinct individuality. Even so in



the forest, the trees that in summer-time present only a confused mass of greenery stand out clearly when the winter snow has fallen and veiled the earth, and each particular tree—be it oak or hornbeam or aspen—is at once recognized.

Just so was it here and now with the village folk.

Antek and Matthew alone remained in their places, sitting side by side, like good friends, and talking in low voices of many a thing. At times one or another of the men would join them, and say a few words. Staho Ploshka came; so did Balcerek, the Voyt's brother, and all those foremost young men in the place who had been bridesmen at Yagna's wedding. They felt at first embarrassed, uncertain whether Antek would not receive them with some sarcastic speech. But he shook hands with all, with friendly looks beaming in his eyes; and they presently came round him, listened to all he said, and were again as friendly as they had been of old, when he was foremost among them all. Yet, remembering that only the day before these very men would have slunk from his way if they had seen him at a distance, he could not repress a bitter smile at times.

"We never see you now! The tavern knows you no more," said Ploshka.

"At work from dawn till night, when can I find time?"

Then they went on to discuss other village topics—their fathers, the lasses, the hard winter weather. Antek spoke little, glancing at the door whenever it opened, in the hope of seeing Yagna coming in. But when Balcerek told them of the meeting held at Klemba's concerning the forest, he roused himself and inquired what they had decided.

"Ah, what indeed? They whined and complained and lamented . . . and decided at last that they ought not to allow it to be felled!"

"Men of straw!" cried Ploshka. "What can be expected of them? They meet, drink vodka, groan, sigh . . . and the outcome of their meeting is as last year's snow. The Squire may safely cut down every tree in the forest."

"That," Matthew put in, curtly, "cannot be allowed."

"Who is to prevent him?" they all asked.

"Who? Why, you!"

"But," said Ploshka, "we are not free to act. Once I spoke—father silenced me. The business was not mine, but theirs, the husbandmen's. I was to let it alone, and blow my own nose. And really, they have the right to speak so. All is in their hands: we have no more say in the matter than the farm-servants."

"And that's unjust."

"The younger generation ought to have a share in the land and the management."

"And our elders to retire on an allowance."

"I," Ploshka exclaimed, "have served in the army, my prime is passing, and yet my father refuses me what is my own!"

"It is time we all had what's ours."

"All here are wronged."

"Antek most of all."

"Let us set matters to rights in Lipka!" said one, in a hoarse voice. This was Simon, Yagna's brother, who had but just come, and was standing behind the others. They eyed him with astonishment, as he pushed forward and spoke hotly of the wrongs he had to suffer. But as he met the young fellows' eyes, he blushed very red, unaccustomed as he was to speak in the presence of many, and also standing as yet somewhat in awe of his mother.

"'Tis Nastka has taught him thus much sense," they laughed. Thereupon Simon said no more, but withdrew to a shady corner; and Gregory Rakoski, the Voyt's brother, though no great speaker and somewhat given to stammering, began to hold forth.

"Our fathers keep the land to themselves, and their children out of it. This is wrong and iniquitous. But the worst is that they manage things foolishly. If they had come to an agreement with the Squire, the question of the forest would have been settled long ago."



"How's that? For every fifteen acres of forest, he offered only two of his land, and we had a right to four."

"A right? That is a question to be decided by the officials."

"Who take the Squire's part?"

"Not so. The commissioner himself advised us not to accept two acres: so the Squire will have to offer more," Balcerek observed.

"Hush now," said Matthew; "here comes the smith, and an old man along with him."

They turned and saw in the doorway the smith, who was arm in arm with an old man. Both had been drinking, and they pushed forward, straight on to the bar, where they, however, remained but a short time, the Jew ushering them into the private room.

"They have been feasting at the Voyt's."

"What, was the christening to-day?" Antek inquired.

"Oh, yes," Ploshka explained; "all our elders are there. The Soltys was godfather, and the godmother, Balcerek's wife: Boryna, it seems, was offended and refused."

"But who," Balcerek cried, "is the old man here?"

Gregory enlightened him: "He is Mr. Yacek, brother to the Squire of Vola!"

They all stood up to look at him. Mr. Yacek was pressing forward slowly, evidently seeking someone. At last his eyes met Bartek of the saw-mill, and he went with him to the wall against which the men of Rzepki sat in a row.

"What does the man want here?"

"Oh, he is always wandering about the villages, talking with peasants—sometimes helping them—playing on his violin, teaching the girls to sing songs: he must be a little crazy."

"Pray, Gregory, go on with what you had to say."

"Ah, about the forest?—I was saying that we should not leave the matter in the hands of the old men: they would bungle it."

"Well, but," Antek said with decision, "there is only one thing to be done: if they set about felling our timber, we

must all of us go and drive them away, until such time as the Squire shall come to terms."

"That is just what they said at Klemba's."

"Said, yes: but what can they do? No one will go with them."

"The husbandmen will."

"Not all of them."

"All, if Boryna leads them!"

"Which is doubtful."

"Then," Balcerek cried hotly, "let Antek be our leader!"

The proposal was enthusiastically assented to. But Gregory, having seen something of the world, and having a little book-learning, set to point out to them, like the scholar that he was, that violence would be no remedy; that all would end in court, and with sentences of imprisonment; and that the right thing was for the people to apply to a lawyer from the town.

But no one agreed with what he said; some even jeered at him. This put him in a great rage, and he said:

"Ye complain that your fathers are fools, whilst ye yourselves are as great fools as they, and talk nonsense, all of you, like children at their games."

Someone here said: "See, Boryna has come, with Yagna and some girls."

Antek, who had intended to answer Gregory, left him unanswered at the words.

They had come late, after supper. The old man had long resisted Yuzka's whimperings and Nastka's entreaties, for he wanted Yagna to join with them in begging him. Now, she had said at once, after dinner, that she would go to hear the band play, and he had told her sternly that she should not set her foot out of doors!

She did not ask him a second time, but cried in corners, and slammed doors, and rushed about by fits and starts, in a gusty way. And when they had supper, she would eat nothing, but set about getting ready to go, and taking her best skirt out of the chest to try it on.

What was the man to do? He swore a lot, talked, said



again that he was not going anywhere—and finally he had very humbly to ask her forgiveness and, willy-nilly, go to the tavern.

He entered with a haughty imposing mien, saluting few of those present, for few of his equals were there, most of them being at the Voyt's for the christening. He looked round carefully for his son, but missed him in the crowd.

Antek gazed on Yagna all the time, as she stood by the bar, while the lads crowded round her begging for a dance. She refused them all, but chatted gaily with them, now and then casting a quick glance here and there. Very lovely did she look that night, and they all eyed her with admiration, the fairest amongst all the women. Yet Nastka was there, arrayed in red, like a tall hollyhock; and Veronka Ploshka, like a peony in bloom, stately and self-possessed; and Soha's daughter, a mere chit of a lass, but so slender and lithe and sweet to look upon! and many another strapping well-favoured girl, who pleased the lads—as did Mary Balcerek, divinely tall, shapely with firm white flesh, and the very best dancer in the village; but not one of them, not a single one, could vie with Yagna.

By her beauty, her attire, and her marvellous turquoise eyes, she surpassed them all, as the rose does the hollyhock, the peony or the poppy-flower, making them appear paltry and plain beside it: so was she above and beyond them, every one. And that evening she had dressed herself as for a wedding: had donned a skirt of rich yellow, striped with white and green; and her bodice of deep-blue velvet, embroidered with gold thread, was cut low, disclosing half of her bosom; and on her chemise of fine linen, with dainty frills, frothing and foaming abundantly about her throat and hands, there hung many a necklace of coral and amber and pearl-like beads. And her head was adorned with a silken kerchief of turquoise-blue, with pink spots, the corners of which floated down on to her neck behind.

For this finery and sumptuousness of adornment, the women's tongues wagged against her with bitter reviling. But she cared not a whit for all they said: she had beheld

Antek. Colouring with delight, she turned to her husband, to whom the Jew had said something. He thereupon went over to the private room, and remained there.

This was precisely what Antek had been waiting for. He at once elbowed his way through the throng, and welcomed them with easy familiarity. But Yuzka sullenly turned her back upon him.

"Have ye come for the band, or for Margaret's betrothal?"

"For the band," Yagna replied, in a voice husky with emotion.

They stood for a while side by side, speechless but breathing fast, and casting side-glances at each other. As the dancers jostled them and drove them towards the wall, Simon took possession of Nastka, Yuzka drifted away somewhere or other, and the couple remained alone.

"How I have waited day by day . . . waited for you!" he whispered.

"How could I come? I am watched closely," she answered, with a thrill, for their hands had somehow come together, and they stood at close quarters, hip touching hip. They both turned pale, their eyes gleamed, and within them other and ineffable music was striking up.

"Pray let me go, and stand away a little," she begged; for they were surrounded with people.

He did not reply, but took her round the waist in a firm grasp, pushed the crowd aside, and, entering the circle of dancers, called out to the musicians:

"An obertas, boys, and a first-class one!"

And how they struck it up, and how the bass-voils growled! For well they knew that Antek, when in a good mood, was lavish of drinks and of money.

His comrades and friends all followed his lead—Ploshka, Balcerek, Gregory, and the rest: while Matthew, whose ribs would not let him join them, stamped upon the floor and shouted encouragement.

Dancing recklessly, Antek soon took the place of the foremost couple, and rushed on, faster and faster still, thought of nothing, cared for nothing whatever, for Yagna was



pressing close to him and entreating him tenderly, again and again, the while gasping to find her breath:

"More, Antek! Pray, yet a little more!"

They danced long, very long, stopping only to take breath and drink a glass of beer; then once more they started off, never noticing that folk were watching them, and whispering—or even uttering aloud—their disapproval.

But Antek no longer cared for anything in the world, now that he felt her at his side, and pressed her to himself till she closed—closed with delight—those dear blue eyes of hers: he had forgotten himself completely—forgotten men and the whole world of men. His blood was at boiling-point, and he knew his strength to be waxing within him, bold, invincible, and filling his bosom full of the sense of force. As to Yagna, she was entirely plunged in the oblivion of love. He was carrying her off along with him—a fiery dragon!—and she neither made nor could make resistance; so masterful was he, bearing her on in his strong embrace, that now and again her eyes would be darkened, and she could think of nothing else but the bliss, the unutterable joy of her youth: the blackness of his brows, his unfathomable eyes, and the crimson allurements of his mouth!

And the violins were all the time playing, as in an enchanted dream, a tune as genial as the harvest breeze, a tune that turned the blood into fire, and made the heart to throb with mighty gladness; and the bass-violis rumbled with a quick jerky cadence, forcing the feet of the dancers to accompany their lilt: while the flute warbled as entrancingly as a blackbird in the springtime, and opening the heart so, and filling it with such rapture, that you quivered all over, your brain swam, you breathed no more, you longed to weep, to laugh, cry out, hug, kiss—and fly away somewhere, out, out into the vast world!

So on they danced, till the tavern shook, and the barrels on which the musicians had their stand shook too.

In the circle of dancers there were about fifty couples, swaying from wall to wall. Sometimes the lamp would

burn low or go out quite; and then the brands on the hearth would fling their ruddy blood-red glow on the dim forms that flitted by, so vague that one could in no wise know which they were—men or women. One saw but waving capotes, skirts, ribbons, aprons, flushed faces, bright eyes, and a mad din of clattering, singing and shouting—all mingled together in one whirling, twirling, swirling, calling, bawling, brawling, stamping, tramping, ramping mass!

Of them all, Antek was the most boisterous and the liveliest, beating the floor with noisy heels, wheeling hither and thither like a whirlwind—falling down in homage, so that they thought he had stumbled—up again with a shout or a song for the musicians to take up after him—he passed round and round, a hurricane that scarce any could follow.

For a full hour he continued thus, indefatigably. Others fell out, exhausted; the musicians' hands were weary with playing: he threw them money, urging them to play as fast as he could dance. In the end, he and Yagna were almost the only couple that held out.

The women were loud in their amazement at such behaviour and, while they censured it, expressed their pity for Boryna; which Yuzka overhearing, and moved more by hatred for her stepmother than by her grudge against Antek, went to tell Boryna what was going on. But the latter, deep in matters of village politics with the elders and with his son-in-law, scarcely heard what she said.

"Let them dance: the tavern is surely for that," he said.

She returned, disappointed, but set to watch them carefully. They were then just after a dance, standing at the bar, in company with many lads and lasses. It was a merry moment; for Ambrose, now completely drunk, was telling them such tales that the girls threw their aprons over their heads, and the lads laughed uproariously. And Antek was treating them all round—drinking to them first, pressing them to drink, taking the boys' arms in a friendly squeeze, and putting caramels into all the lasses' bosoms by handfuls—that he might deal likewise by Yagna.

Thus they were all diverting themselves pretty well; all



the company was in the gayest key. Even the "nobility" of Rzepki had left their table, having made it up with the Lipka folk over some glasses. Several of them, too, had offered to dance, and the girls had not refused them: their behaviour was so much more refined, and they asked them with so great courtesy.

Antek's set revelled apart from the others. They were of the younger generation, and of the first people in Lipka. As to him, though he talked with them all, he had no idea what he was talking about—neither knew nor cared: he concealed nothing, and could conceal nothing, for he could not help doing what he did then. But it was all the same to him! He continually whispered in Yagna's ear, pushing her nearer and nearer to the wall; his arm was round her waist, her hand in his; he could scarce restrain himself from kissing her in public. His eyes wandered, with a wild look, a tempest raged in his heart, and he would have dared to do no matter what, reading, as he did, in those turquoise-blue eyes of hers, her admiration and her love. It raised his pride to heights unknown, and he felt himself so exalted that he must needs cry and shout aloud in ecstasy. Then he drank again, and forced Yagna to drink, till her clouded mind no longer knew what had come to pass. Only at times, when the music paused, and there was a lull in the tavern din, did she return a little to her senses, and look around in terrified bewilderment, seeking help—she knew not whence. At such moments, she would even have fled; but he was close by, gazing on her, and the fire in his eyes kindled in her such love that at once she forgot everything.

This went on for a pretty long time. Antek stood drinks to all the company, whom the Jew served very willingly, chalking up every litre twice upon the door.

Their heads were now turning, and they all went to dance together, thinking it might sober them a little; and Antek with Yagna led the dance.

At that moment, out of the private room came Boryna, whom the women, shocked at what was going on, had brought to see. Instantly he understood everything, and

was transported with rage. He buttoned up his capote, seized his fur cap, and pushed on to Yagna. They made way for him, shrinking from the old man's face, pale as death, and his eyes that glared with fury.

"Home!" he commanded in a loud voice, as the couple approached, and tried to seize her arm. But Antek, spinning on his heel, bore her away, so that she could not free herself from him.

And then Boryna, leaping forwards, broke through the ring of dancers, tore her from Antek's arms, and never let her leave his grasp till they were out of the tavern. He had not so much as glanced at his son.

Thereupon the band ceased playing; a sinister silence fell upon them all, and they stood as though petrified. All saw that some awful thing was about to take place; for Antek had gone out after them, pushing the throng aside like sheaves of corn and rushing into the night. But the sudden and intense cold made him giddy; he stumbled over a tree-trunk that lay in front of the house, and into a snow-drift. Rising swiftly, however, he came up with them at the turning of the road by the pond.

"Go your ways and let folk be!" the old man cried, turning upon him.

Yagna ran shrieking into the hut; but Yuzka put a heavy cudgel into her father's hand, screaming:

"Down with that ruffian, dad! down with him!"

"Let her go . . . let her go!" Antek vociferated, quite beside himself, coming on with clenched fists to the attack.

"Off, I say! or, as there's a God in heaven, I kill you like a dog! Off!" the old man cried again, ready to strike a crushing blow. . . . And Antek instinctively shrank back; his arms fell to his sides. A sudden panic had taken hold of him; he shuddered with dread, and let his father go slowly home.

He had no longer even the thought of leaping after him as he went away, but stood trembling, distracted, and casting bewildered looks around. No one was there; the moon shone, the snows sparkled, a sombre whiteness made things



just visible. He could not understand what had taken place, and only came partly to his right mind a little later, when brought back to the tavern by the friends who had come out to render assistance, having heard there had been a fight between him and his father.

The merry-making was all over now, and the people were going to their homes, for it was late. The tavern had now emptied itself, but there were, along the road, a few shouts and cries. No one remained but the folk of Rzepki, who were to spend the night there, and to whom Mr. Yacek was playing such weirdly and wailingly mournful airs that they sighed as they sat listening, elbows on table and arms propping chins. Antek moped all alone in a corner, apart from the others: talk with him was out of the question; for when they spoke, he would not answer. There, then, he sat dazed and stunned, and the Jew reminded him in vain that the house was about to close: he neither made out nor heard what was said. It was only at Hanka's voice, who had been told he had again come to blows with his father, that he roused himself.

"What do you want?" he snarled.

"Come home. It is late," she said beseechingly, restraining her tears.

"Go yourself. With you I will not go.—Away, I tell you!" he cried in a threatening voice. Then, on a sudden, moved by some unaccountable impulse, he came close and hissed in her ear: "Were I chained and fettered in a prison cell, I should still be more free than with you beside me—far more!"

Hanka withdrew at once, weeping bitterly.

The night was moonlit and serene. The trees threw long bluish-silvery shadows. The frost nipped very hard, making the fence-hurdles crackle from time to time, and a sort of quiet rustling sound rise up from the scintillating snow. Save for this faint susurrations in the still night, all the land lay silent. The villagers slept; no light came from any window, not a dog barked, mill and mill-stream were alike soundless. Antek could just hear—faint like a sound heard

in sleep—the husky voice of Ambrose, singing (according to his wont when drunk) in the middle of the road.

With slow and heavy steps, he plodded round the mill-pond, stopping at times to cast bewildered looks from side to side, and listening with dread to his father's awful words, that were still ringing in his ears. Still, too, did he see those stern, fierce, baleful eyes: they pierced him like a knife! Instinctively he winced before them: terror gripped him by the throat, his heart sank within him, and his hair stood on end. And they blotted out from his thoughts all the impetuosity of erewhile—all his headstrong love and passion—everything but mortal dread, trembling dismay, and a wretched sense of weakness and despair.

After a time he unconsciously set his face homewards. As he went, a pitiful cry, a voice of lamentation, reached him from near the church. Someone just beneath the statue which stood in front of the lich-gate lay on the snow, with arms outstretched as one crucified; but in the shade which fell from the churchyard wall, he could not discern who it was. He stooped down, thinking it was some homeless wanderer, perhaps overtaken by drink. And there, imploring the mercy of God, lay Hanka!

"Come home . . . the cold is fearful . . . come, Hanka!" He spoke with entreaty, his soul melting strangely within him. She answered nothing. Then he lifted her up and took her home.

All the way, they were mute. But Hanka wept grievously.



## CHAPTER VIII

**A**FTER that Twelfth Night, Boryna's house became like a tomb. No weeping, no clamour, no invectives: but a sinister silence dwelt there, telling of rancour and suppressed resentment.

Everybody in the house was now taciturn, veiled in gloom, living in the continual expectation of some awful thing about to take place, as under a roof that one knows may at any time crash down upon one's head.

Neither on his return to the hut, nor even the next day, did Boryna say a single sharp word to Yagna. Nor did he complain to Dominikova: he kept silence about all that had happened.

But the paroxysm of anger he had felt made him ill: he was unable to rise from his bed, had continual qualms, a stitch in his side, and fits of fever now and then.

"'Tis nothing much; only the liver is inflamed, or perhaps the womb has changed position," was Dominikova's diagnosis, as she rubbed his side with hot oil. He replied nothing, but groaned heavily, staring at the rafters above.

"It was not Yagna's fault, indeed it was not!" she said, speaking low, lest they should hear her from the other room. She felt extreme uneasiness at his saying no word to her about the happenings of the night before.

"Whose then?" he muttered.

"What evil has she done? Ye left her, and went away to drink in the private room; the band played, and all the folk danced in the other. What then? Ought she to have sat alone in a corner? She is a young healthy woman, and needs to be amused. Well, he was urgent, and she danced with him. Could she help it? In the tavern, everyone has the right to choose his dancer. He—that wretch! choose

her, and would not leave her alone . . . all out of spite against you!"

"'Tis good ye rub me to set me on my legs again; but I will take no lessons from you. I know the truth of the matter quite well."

"Are ye so wise? Then should ye know that a young woman in good health needs some pleasure. She is not a log of wood, neither is she an old dame: she married a man, and a man she must have. Not a decrepit veteran, with whom she can only tell her beads! No, no!"

"Yet ye gave her to me in marriage: wherefore, then?" he asked, with a sneer.

"Wherefore? And who was it came whining like a dog? Was it I who implored you to take her? Did I entice you . . . or did she? Why, she might have wedded anyone, aye, and of the first in Lipka: so many were after her!"

"After her, yes; to wed her, no."

"Yelping cur! May your tongue rot off!"

"Ah! the truth is a stinging nettle to you!"

"'Tis no truth, but a wicked lie!"

He drew up the blanket over his chest, turned his face to the wall, and answered not one word more to all her heated arguments; only, when she at last burst into tears, he whispered mockingly:

"'If a woman's tongue fail, she thinks tears will prevail.'"

On the point in discussion, he had come to a strong conviction. Whilst he was laid up, the things he had heard of old against Yagna had all come back to him: he had pondered them well in his mind, gathered them together, and thought them over.—And now such bitter exasperation took hold of him for his inability to quit his bed, that he would toss upon it all day with silent angry curses, following, with the fierce eyes of a falcon, every step that Yagna took. She, pale and drooping, would go about the house like a sleep-walker, looking at him with the wistful eyes of an ill-treated child, and sighing so deeply that he could not but feel some compassion for her—though her sighs inflamed his jealousy still more.



And so things dragged on in the hut till Sunday. She, who by nature was extremely sensitive, could hardly bear it any more, and, like a delicate flower that feels the first touch of frost, began to pine and waste away. Daily she looked worse and worse, could sleep no more, was unable to sit still, and spoiled all she did, her work slipping through her fingers. She lived in perpetual dread besides. The old man still kept his bed, moaning, saying never one word of kindness to her, but fixing his gloomy hostile eyes upon her constantly, until she could no longer support it. Life was a burden. And also she was deeply distressed and anxious at getting no more news from Antek. Since Twelfth Night he had never come, though more than once, in spite of the mortal fear she was prey to, she had repaired to the hay-rick. Of course she durst ask no one for news of him. And by this time she loathed her cabin so heartily that she would several times in the day run out to see her mother. But Dominikova was mostly either visiting patients or in church, and, when at home, had only sour looks and bitter reproaches for her. The lads, too, went about moody and sullen, ever since their mother had taken a flax-swingle to Simon for having spent four whole *zloty* in drink at the tavern on Twelfth Night! To get through the day somehow, Yagna would also look in at the neighbours'; but with them too she felt ill at ease. Without telling her to begone, they let their words drop sparingly, sifting them, so to speak: all were very, very sorry that Boryna had fallen ill, and had much to say against the evil times in which they lived.

Yuzka, too, did all she could to annoy her at every step. And Vitek feared to chatter as he had used to do, now his master was of such grim humour. So no conversation was possible with anyone; she had no solace, no diversion at all, save with Pete of an evening, when he played the violin quietly to her in the stable after his day's work, old Boryna having forbidden him to play in the hut.

The winter, moreover, was so severe with daily frosts and blizzards that she often could not go out at all.

But when Saturday came round, Boryna, though not yet quite well, dragged himself out of bed, put on warm clothes against the intense cold, and ventured out.

He called at several huts, ostensibly to warm himself, or to talk of business, and now chatted willingly with some that he would formerly have passed by without a word. He always managed to bring the conversation round to the tavern incident, giving the whole affair a comical turn: he had, he said, been most ridiculously tipsy that night.

Wondering, they agreed with him, nodding sagacious heads; but they were not taken in, all the same. They knew too well that headstrong pride of his, for which he would let himself be roasted alive without uttering a cry.

They quite understood that he came on purpose to give the lie to any malicious tales that might have been circulated.

Old Simon, the Soltys, even told him as much quite frankly, as his custom was:

"'Fiddle-de-dee, fiddle-de-dee!—One fable and two make three.' Gossip is like fire: ye shall not quench it with your hands—only burn them.—Let me repeat to you what I said before your wedding: 'He that takes for a wife one that might be his daughter, for his pains gets a fiend who will scorn holy water.'"

He went home, offended. Yagna, thinking all was over now he had got up, felt relieved, tried to talk and look sweet and be loving and joke with him as before. But he met her advances with so crushing a word that she shuddered to hear it; and no change in him took place with time. He no longer caressed or petted her at all, nor anticipated her wishes, nor cared to win her smiles. If anything was in disorder, he would scold her and drive her to work like a common servant-girl.

And thenceforward he took everything in hand again, looked after all by himself, and saw to everything with his own eyes. For days together, after his recovery, he threshed corn with Pete, and winnowed it in the granary, scarcely ever leaving the premises even for an instant. His



evenings, too, he spent at home, mending harnesses, or repairing domestic implements. She could take no step out of doors without his going to look for her; and he went so far as to lock up her Sunday clothes and keep the key in his pocket.

How she suffered, how she suffered! Not content with rating her soundly for the slightest shortcomings, with never a word of praise, he treated her just as if she were not the mistress of his house. It was with Yuzka alone that he took counsel about what was to be done, explaining what she did not understand, and ordering her to have an eye to everything. For days together, she did nothing but spin at home, almost distracted. She went to complain to her mother, who set herself to plead for her, but in vain.

"She was mistress," Boryna replied, "and did whatever she pleased, and lacked naught. But she has failed to act up to her position: let her now try something else! And, hark ye! tell her that, so long as I can move my limbs, I will defend what is mine, and not suffer myself to be a laughing-stock, or branded with the name of cuckold! Let her bear that in mind!"

"But, good heavens, man! she has done you no injury whatever!"

"Oh, if she had, I should speak and act otherwise! It is enough for me that she has had to do with Antek!"

"Why, 'twas at the tavern . . . in a dance . . . in the presence of everyone!"

"Oho! Only at the tavern? Indeed?" For he shrewdly guessed that at the time when he found her apron, she had been out to meet Antek.

No, he was not to be talked over. His faith in her was gone, and his mind quite made up about her. At last:

"I am," he said, "a kind-hearted and a good-natured man: all know that. . . . But 'strike me a blow with a whip, I at once hit back with a cudgel!'"

"Hit the guilty, all right: but beware of hitting wrong. Every wrong cries out for vengeance."

"When I defend my right, I do no wrong."

"Aye, but find out betimes how far your right extends."

"Is this a threat?"

"I say what I think. Ye are too self-confident: take heed. 'Who to another gives an evil name, himself deserves the same.'"

"I have enough of all your proverbs and your lectures!" Boryna angrily rejoined.

Seeing the man's stubbornness, Dominikova gave up the attempt, and did not try again. She hoped the storm would blow over and things take a better turn; but he did not for an instant swerve from the line he had taken up; he never wavered in his severity, and even tasted a grim pleasure in it. Sometimes, indeed, hearing Yagna weep of nights, he instinctively started up to go to her side—but, remembering in time, would walk to the window and look out.

A couple of weeks elapsed in this way, without any change. Yagna was wearied out, melancholy, and so wretched-looking that she could scarcely bear to be seen by people; she was ashamed before the whole village, for everyone knew what was going on at Boryna's.

This cast a deep and mournful shadow on his home, and it became the abode of apprehension and of silence.

Few people, it is true, came to call upon them. The Voyt, offended at Boryna's refusal to come to his child's christening, no longer darkened his door. Now and then, Dominikova's sons looked in; Nastka came with her distaff, but chiefly to see Yuzka or meet Simon. Roch, too, now and again showed himself there, but never for a long visit, seeing such sullen gloomy faces.

The smith alone came every evening, and for a long stay, each time embittering the old man against Yagna as much as he could: for he had again got into Boryna's good graces. Yagustynka, besides, dropped in frequently, enjoying their quarrels, and adding fuel to the fire with great relish. Dominikova, present daily, daily preached to Yagna the duty of winning her husband back by submission and humility.

It was of no use. Yagna could not humble herself; for



her life, she could not. On the contrary, she felt more resentful every day, more inclined to revolt against his rule. Yagustynka did a good deal to make this inclination stronger. She said to her one day:

"O Yagna, I do grieve for you—aye, as though you were my own daughter! That hound, to ill-treat you so! and you bear it all like a lamb! Another woman would not behave in that wise. Oh, no!"

"And how then?" She put the question with some curiosity, having more than enough of the present state of things.

"You will not overcome evil with good, but only make the evil worse. He uses you as a common wench, and ye let him. He has locked up your things, they say; he dogs every one of your footsteps, and never gives you one word of comfort; and you, what do you do? Sigh, moan, and wait for Heaven to set matters right. Ah, but Heaven helps those that help themselves! Were I in your place, I know well what I should do. First, I should flog Yuzka till she gave up meddling with the household. Are ye not the mistress here?—Then, I would not yield in aught to the good-man. Will he have war? Then let him have war till he is sick of it. Aye, aye! Let him but get the upper hand, and he will soon come to beating you . . . and how far he will go afterwards I cannot tell."

"But first of all"—here she lowered her voice and spoke in her ear—"let him be as a calf weaned from its mother. Let him perforce keep himself to himself, and be like a dog left outside on the threshold. Ye will soon see how much milder and better-behaved he will grow."

Yagna turned aside to hide her scarlet blushes.

"What, ashamed? Foolish girl! Why, all do likewise, and will ever do so: this is no new discovery of mine. A dog follows a piece of bacon: even so, and more so, does a petticoat allure a man! Of an old man, this is still truer, he being more self-indulgent, and less likely to find comfort elsewhere.—Do as I say, and ye will thank me soon.—And as to what folk say of you and Antek, do not take it to

heart; were you white as driven snow, they still would think you sooty. But it is the way of the world: all rise against the meek, if they but crook their finger; and who is proud and determined may do what the devil he pleases, no one will dare to raise his voice against him, but all will fawn upon him like curs. The world belongs to the strong, the dauntless, the resolute.—Oh, they slandered me not a little in my time . . . and your mother as well.—About Florek . . . a matter well known to all.”

“Let my mother be!”

“Ah, well! may she ever remain a saint in your eyes. . . . We all must needs hold someone for a saint.”

She went on with these instructions. Little by little, and unasked, she began to tell her things about Antek—things of her own invention, but interesting. Yagna listened with greedy ears, though careful not to betray herself in any wise. But she thought well all day of the advice given; and in the evening, when the smith, and Roch, and Nastka were present, she said to her husband:

“Hand me the key of my chest: I must air my things.”

He was ashamed to refuse, with Nastka tittering at his side; but after she had put the clothes back, he stretched out his hand for the key.

“In the chest there are only my own garments: I am quite able to keep the key by myself!” she boldly replied.

That evening marked the commencement of a new state of things in the cabin: life there became a hell. As stubborn as the old man was obstinate, to any rebuke of his she replied in a voice that might be heard out in the road. She pounced upon Yuzka wherever and whenever she could, and more than once inflicted so severe a beating on her that the girl ran crying to complain to her father. And complaints were of no avail: she persecuted her still more fiercely afterwards, when Yuzka had not obeyed. Her evenings she decided to spend on the other side of the passage, leaving her husband alone, and ordering Pete to come there and play to her, and accompany the ditties she would sing till late at night. And on Sundays, dressed in her very best clothes, she



went to church without waiting for Boryna, and talked to the farm-servants on the way.

Wondering at this transformation, he raged and fumed, but did his best to withhold the knowledge of it from the village. She was not to be put down; and, little by little, he began to overlook her whims in order to have a quiet life.

"Why, good dame," he once exclaimed to Yagustynka, "she was even as a lamb before—the gentlest of ewe-lambs; and behold, she butts now like a ram!"

"She has waxed fat, and is too full of fodder!" Yagustynka replied with indignation; she always took the part of anyone that asked her advice. "But let me tell you, ye should drive out these humours of hers with a stick betimes, lest ye may not prevail later, even with a club!"

"Such was never the custom of the Borynas!" he returned, in a lofty way.

"Yet methinks," she spitefully remarked, "that even the Borynas will have to come to that!"

A few days later, just after Candlemas, Ambrose came in the afternoon to tell them the priest would come the next day for the *Kolendy*<sup>1</sup> visit.

All the morning they were busily engaged in a general cleaning. The old man, to avoid hearing Yagna continually abuse and upbraid Yuzka for all she did, had gone out to sweep the snow about the premises. The rooms were given fresh air, the walls cleared of cobwebs; Yuzka strewed the porch and passage with yellow sand, and they all arrayed themselves in their very best attire; for the priest was now not far off, officiating at neighbour Balcerek's.

Presently his sledge stood outside the porch; and he, with his surplice over his fur, and accompanied by two of the organist's sons in choir-boys' robes, entered the cabin. Before him, Boryna carried a deep plate, full of holy water. He said some Latin prayers, sprinkled the rooms, and then went out to bless the farm-buildings and all the man's pos-

<sup>1</sup> *Kolendy*. An annual ceremony of blessing the house and farm and the live stock.—*Translator's Note*.

sessions, passing round and saying the sacred words aloud, the organist's boys walking on either side of him, singing Christmas carols, and untiringly ringing and swinging their little jingling bells. Boryna carried the holy water before; the others walked behind, in procession.

All being over, he returned to the cabin to rest; and while Boryna, aided by Pete, was putting fifty litres of oats, and half as many of pease, in the priest's sledge, he was listening to Yuzka's and Vitek's prayers, which they repeated to him in the cabin.

They knew them perfectly. Who had taught them? he wondered.

"Kuba taught me my prayers; Roch, my catechism and by primer!" the lad answered boldly. The priest patted him on the head, and gave each of them a couple of pictures. Then he told them to obey their elders, never neglect prayer, and beware of sin. "For Satan, whithersoever we go, is on the watch, ready to drag us down to hell." Then, raising his voice, he concluded with a solemn warning:

"And this I say unto you, that nothing, no, nothing is hidden from the eye of the just God. Beware therefore of the day of judgment and of doom: repent ye, and mend your ways whilst it is yet time!"

The two children burst into tears, feeling as at church during a sermon. And Yagna's heart throbbed with dread, and a deep blush overspread her face; she knew those words were meant for her, and as soon as Matthias returned she left the room, without daring to raise her eyes to the priest.

"I should like to have a talk with you, Matthias," he said, when they were alone together. Motioning him to a seat by his side, he cleared his throat, offered him snuff, used a beautifully scented pocket-handkerchief, and, making his finger-joints crack one after another, began quietly:

"I have heard—yes, Matthias, I have heard of what took place in the tavern not long ago."

"Aye, indeed," the old farmer returned, with a pained look; "it was public enough, to be sure."



"Do not go to the tavern, and do not take your women-folk thither: how often have I forbidden it! I wear my lungs out in beseeching you. . . . No use!—Well, ye have received what you deserved.—Nevertheless, I thank God most heartily that in all this there has been no very grievous sin. I repeat: no grievous sin."

"None?" Boryna's face brightened: he did not distrust the priest.

"But I have also been told that you are punishing your wife very severely for what has happened. This is not just, and injustice is a sin. A sin."

"How's that? I am only holding her in with a tighter hand. I am only . . ."

Here the priest interrupted him, saying excitedly: "Antek, not she, was at fault! It was to spite you that he forced her to dance with him; evidently he wanted a scene. A scene." Of this he felt quite sure: Dominikova, in whom he reposed much confidence, had given him her account of things.—"What else had I to say to you?—Ah, yes! Your filly wanders loose about the stable. You must tie her up, else one of the horses may injure her with a kick. Last year I had my mare lamed that way. . . . Whose is her sire?"

"The miller's."

"I was sure of it—knew it by her colour and the white spot on her forehead.—A fine filly!—But, as to Antek now: you and he should be reconciled: your disagreement is driving that young fellow to evil ways."

"I did not begin the quarrel," Boryna replied with decision, "and I am not going to beg him to end it."

"The advice I give you it is my duty as a priest to give. As to taking it, follow what your own conscience says. Only mark this well: he is going to his destruction, and you let him go. He drinks continually in the tavern, is a fire-brand among the young men, incites them to revolt against their elders, and—as I hear—is plotting harm to the manor folk."

"Of that I knew nothing."

"One tainted sheep infects the flock. And these plots against the manor may result in great evil to the village people." But on this point Boryna was doggedly mute; so the priest changed the subject, and said finally:

"Union, my dear friend, is the only thing. Union." He took snuff, put his fur cap on, and added: "Union and brotherly love make the whole world go round. And that is why the manor would willingly come to an agreement with you. The Squire told me as much: he is a good man, and would fain arrive at a neighbourly understanding with everyone . . ."

"When a wolf is your neighbour, you can only come to an understanding with a club or an ax!"

The priest started, shocked at the words, and looked him steadily in the face; but, seeing the cold relentless expression of his eyes and his set lips, turned away hastily, and rubbed his hands, much upset.

"I must away. Allow me to repeat that you ought not to set your wife against you by severe treatment. She is young—flighty, too, as women are—and you should deal with her wisely, and justly as well: be blind to one thing, deaf to another, and overlook a third. Thus ye may avoid unpleasant scenes, which might have most evil consequences. Yes: our Lord has a special blessing for peacemakers. For peacemakers.—Oh! what on earth is this?" he suddenly exclaimed, much startled; for the stork, hitherto standing motionless by the chest, had unexpectedly pecked with all its might at the priest's well-polished boot.

"It's only a stork, that remained here in autumn, with a broken wing, and Vitek took care of it, and nursed it till it got well again. Now it stays in the hut with us, and catches mice as well as any cat could do."

"Really? I never yet saw a tame stork. Curious, most curious!"

He bent down to give Bociek a caress; but this it would have none of, and with curved neck meditated another sly attack on the priest's boot.



"Upon my word, I like it so much that, if you would sell it, I would gladly buy it of you."

"Sell it? Not I. But the lad shall take it at once to your Reverence's house."

"I will send Valentine for it."

"Ah, but no one save Vitek may touch it, and it obeys him alone."

They called the boy in; the priest gave him a *zloty* and told him to bring it in the evening, after the round of the parish had been finished. Vitek cried much and, after the priest's departure, took Bociek with him to the byre, where he blubbered aloud till dusk; then Boryna came to silence him and remind him that the bird had to be taken; Vitek unwillingly obeyed, but his heart melted in his breast, and he went about, his eyes swollen with tears and like one half-witted, now and then running to the stork, gathering it in his arms and kissing it, weeping sorely all the while.

So, when the priest was home at nightfall, he wrapped Bociek up in his own little capote, to protect it from the cold, and (together with Yuzka, for the bird was too heavy for him alone to carry) took it over to the priest's: Lapa accompanying them, and barking moodily all the way.

Now, the more the old man weighed the priest's words, and his strong and evidently sincere assertions, the more satisfied and tranquil did he become: so that, slowly and by imperceptible degrees, he changed his attitude towards Yagna.

Yet, though things returned to their former state, the former peace of mind, the deep quiet trust of old, was there no longer.

As when a broken vessel has been repaired with wire woven around it, it indeed looks whole, yet somehow leaks and lets the water through, though the place of leakage is invisible to the eye: so was it likewise in that hut: from within that reconciliation, and through unseen fissures, the secret mistrust it contained came forth by drops; and though resentment was no more so keen, suspicion still remained alive and undying.

Hard as he tried, the old man could not quite rid himself of his distrust. Almost unwittingly, he constantly had an eye on Yagna's every motion; and she, on her part, never forgave his past anger and bitter words, and boiled with resentment that now too she could not but notice how keenly vigilant his eyes were.

Perhaps, too, the certitude that he was watching and put no trust in her made her dislike him more violently, and love Antek more.

She had managed things so dexterously that they often met by the haystack. Vitek was their helper in this. Since the loss of his stork, his master's displeasure troubled him not at all, and he had quite gone over to Yagna. She, on her side, gave him better food to eat, and Antek very often had a few kopeks for the lad. But their chief abettor in this was Yagustynka, who had so crept into Yagna's good graces, and had so won Antek's confidence, that they simply could not do without her. She brought messages to and fro, protected them from surprises on the part of Boryna, and kept good watch over him. All this she did out of pure hatred for people. She wreaked upon others her revenge for the harsh treatment meted out to her. Though she detested both Antek and Yagna, she detested still more the old husband, who was one of the rich men in the village. And yet she had for the poor not less of hatred and even more of scorn!

In truth, she was diabolically wicked . . . and possibly, as folk whispered, evil in a yet more unearthly sense.

"They will," she often said to herself, "one day fly at each other, and fight it out like mad dogs."

In winter there was but little to do; so she used to go with her distaff from hut to hut, listening to the talk and setting folk by the ears and laughing with impartiality at everyone. None durst close their doors on her, partly out of fear of her tongue, partly because she was thought to have the evil eye. At times, too, she looked in at Antek's, but for the most part she met him on his return from work, and brought him news from Yagna.



About a fortnight after the priest's visit, she saw the young man on his way past the pond.

"Do you know? Old Boryna said many things to the priest against you."

"Of what new thing has he been yelping?" was his contemptuous answer.

"He says you stir folk up against the manor, and that the gendarmes ought to arrest you."

"Let him but try! Ere they get hold of me, I would make such a 'Red Cock' perch on his roof, that his place would burn down to the ground," he replied in a great rage.

She at once ran to tell the old man, who thought the news over for a time, and then remarked: "'Tis like him, the villain! He is the very man to do such a thing."

He said no more, not wishing to take counsel with a woman; but to Roch, who came in the evening, he told all.

"Do not believe whatever Yagustynka says: she is an evil-minded beldame."

"Yes, it may be all a falsehood: yet such things have been. Old Prychek burnt his father-in-law's hut down for dealing unjustly by him in dividing the land. True, he went to prison, but he burnt it down. . . . And Antek may do the same. And he must have said something; she could not have made it all up."

Roch, who was a kind-hearted man, felt greatly pained, and tried to advise him.

"Make it up. Let him have a little land for himself: to live, he needs the wherewithal. Besides, that would steady him, and leave him without excuse for quarrels and threats."

"No! Were I even to be quite ruined—made a beggar—no! Beg I may, but, so long as I live, not one inch of my land will I give up. . . . That he struck me and used me shamefully, I could forgive, though hardly and with pain; but should he attempt such a thing as this . . . !"

"Is it meet to take the tattle of a gossip so to heart?"

"I do not believe it, not I!—But what maddens me, what makes my blood run cold, is that it *might* be true!"

He sat with fists clenched, motionless and numb, at the bare possibility of so heinous an act. He had no proof of Yagna's guilt, nay, he felt really sure she was innocent. But he shrewdly guessed that in his son's hatred for him there was more than mere resentment for the land withheld; that the wild reckless look he had seen in Antek's eyes came from some other cause. And he, too, was instantly aware of the same feeling within himself—of cold, revengeful, implacable hate. He turned to Roch, and muttered:

"There is not room enough in Lipka for us twain!"

"What—what can ye mean?" Roch cried in alarm.

"God forbid he fall into my hands, if I seize him in the act!"

Roch did his best to calm him and bring him round, but to no purpose.

"Ah, he would burn me out, would he?—That remains to be seen!"

Thenceforward he had no peace. Every evening he watched in secret, hiding behind corners, making the round of the house and messuages, looking under the thatches; and often, waking up at night, he would listen for hours together or, jumping out of bed, go round the premises with his dog. And once he saw certain faint traces about the haystack, where the ground had been trampled. Later, he found marks of footsteps near the stile, and became more and more convinced that Antek had been there at night, and was only seeking an opportunity to set the rick on fire. For as yet he had no thought of any other possible outrage.

He purchased a very savage dog from the miller, chained it up in a kennel under the shed, and made it more savage still by starving and baiting it. At night he would set it free, and then it would bark furiously and set upon anyone it met. It bit several people so seriously that complaints were lodged against Boryna.

But this vigilance and these precautions made the old man weaker and weaker, though his eyes glowed with feverish excitement.



He had determined to speak and complain to no one any more; this very greatly increased the intensity of his sufferings.

It also prevented anyone from guessing the cause of his restless behaviour.

That he watched so carefully over the premises, and had bought that dog, and made those nightly rounds, found an easy explanation. That winter, wolves had multiplied to an extraordinary degree; almost every night, they would approach the village in packs, and the inhabitants often heard them howl; not infrequently, too, they scratched holes under the byres, and carried off something here and there. Moreover, as was common enough just before the spring, cases of theft became more rife. A peasant in Debitsa had been robbed of a couple of mares; in Rudka, a hog had been stolen; elsewhere, a cow was missing. Therefore did many a man in Lipka scratch his head, and get better locks, and keep good watch over his stables; for the horses there were the very best in the district.

So the days went on, slowly, regularly, like the hands of a clock—only neither to be pushed forward nor set back.

Not only was the winter uncommonly severe, but the weather was also unusually changeable. There were such frosts as the oldest inhabitants had never known; sometimes the snow would fall in immense quantities; then it would thaw for whole weeks together, so that the ditches were filled with water, and the fields stretched out, black and desolate: after which there would be whirlwinds and snow-drifts such as the land had never seen as yet—and then a spell of serene calm weather, when the lanes swarmed with children, and the folk were glad, and the old people basked against the warm sunny walls.

In Lipka things went on according to the everlasting ordinance. He that was predestined to death died; whoso was to be glad rejoiced; he that was fated to be sick confessed his sins, and awaited the end. And so, with the help of God, they continued to live on, from day to day, from week to week.

Meanwhile, every Sunday, the band played loud in the tavern, and there they danced, quarrelled at times, or even came to blows: wherefore the priest chid them sternly from the pulpit, and many troubles came of it. Klemba's daughter married, and they enjoyed themselves, dancing for three whole days; and—so folk said—Klemba had to borrow fifty roubles of the organist to pay the expenses. The Soltys, too, gave a fairly good banquet at his daughter's betrothal to Ploshka. Elsewhere there were christenings, but not many now: numbers of women were expecting a child in spring.

It was then that old Prychek died; after but one week's sickness he died, poor man! at only threescore and four years of age. All the village went to his funeral, for his children had made a grand funeral feast.

In certain huts they came together to spin, and so many girls and farm-lads were there that they enjoyed themselves perfectly, with plenty of laughter and gladness; especially as Matthew, now quite well again, was mostly present, and the life of the party wherever he went.

The village was thus alive and humming with continual gossip and scandal; invectives now and then, and bickering, or only bits of interesting news. And from time to time there would come one of those *Dziads* who had seen and could tell of many a place and thing; and such a one would stay with them for many a week.

Or, again, a letter would sometimes come in from somebody's boy in the army. Oh, then!—how it was read over, and commented on, and talked about, with lasses' sighs and mothers' tears, for whole weeks and more!

What other topics were there? Well, Magda had taken service at the tavern; and Boryna's dog had bitten Valek's boy, who had threatened to bring an action; and Andrew's cow, stuffed too full of potatoes, had choked and swollen so that Ambrose had to slaughter her; and Gregory had borrowed a hundred and fifty roubles of the miller and given a meadow in pledge for the sum; and the smith had bought a couple of horses, a fact that made folk wonder very much;



and his Reverence had been ill for a whole week, a priest from Tymov coming to take the services in his place. They talked of thieves besides; old twaddling women babbled of ghosts; much was spoken about the wolves that were said to have killed some of the manor sheep; about household matters besides, and happenings in far-off countries, and I know not what more—beyond telling or remembering. And always there was something new, to make the day and the long evenings full of interest.

So it was, too, at Boryna's home; only he stayed in the house continually, and neither went out himself nor would let his family go anywhere. Yagna was wretched about it, and Yuzka grumbled angrily all the day long. The cabin life tired her mortally. The only solace she had was that he did not forbid her to go spinning to those huts (but to those only), where no young folk dwelt. Most of the time, therefore, they stayed moping at home.

One evening—it was towards the end of February—several people had come in, and were all sitting together in the other lodgings, where Dominikova was weaving canvas cloth by lamplight, and the rest of the company crowded round the fire-place, because it was very cold. Yagna and Nastka spun till their spindles hummed. Supper was preparing. Yuzka pottered restlessly about the room, and the old man sat by the chimney-corner, pipe in mouth, puffing away, and thinking deeply.

The stillness was irksome to them all. Only the fire crackled, a cricket chirped in a corner, the loom whirred at regular intervals: but no one spoke. It was Nastka who first broke silence.

"Are you going to spin at the Klembas' to-morrow?"

"Roch has promised to be there, and to read a book about our kings of old."

"I should like to go, but I cannot tell as yet," she replied, with a questioning glance at her husband.

"Oh, pray do let me go, Father," Yuzka begged.

He did not answer. The dog was barking loud outside,

and in came Yasyek, nicknamed Topsy-turvy, looking about him apprehensively.

"Shut the door after you, you gaby!" Dominikova shouted at him. "This is not a cow-byre."

"Do not be so frightened," Yagna added; "no one will eat you.—Why do you look round so?"

"Because of that stork. . . . He is somewhere in hiding, belike, ready to peck at me!" he stammered, peering into the corners in alarm.

"No," Vitek growled in reply, "he will harm you no more: Master has sent Bociek away."

"And I cannot tell why ye kept the bird at all: he did naught but mischief."

"Be seated, and give over grumbling," Nastka said, making room for him by her side.

"Ha!" Vitek exclaimed complainingly, "whom did he ever hurt save fools and strange dogs? He would walk the room, strutting like any Squire. . . . And he caught mice . . . and was never in the way. . . . And now they have sent him from us!"

"Be comforted: you will tame another when spring comes round, since you care so much for storks."

"Not I! This same one will ever be mine. I have a contrivance to bring him to me, as soon as we shall have warm weather: he cannot choose but come."

Yasyek was most inquisitive as to Vitek's contrivance; but the latter told him rudely that what he could not find out by himself he would not be told, and that only a fool could be so greedy of another's contrivances.

For this he was rebuked by Nastka, who took Yasyek's part; and indeed he was much in her thoughts. True, he was rather foolish, and the village folk laughed at him; but then he was an only child, with ten acres of land; whereas (as she well knew) Simon had only five, and very possibly his mother would not let him marry her; so she kept on good terms with Yasyek, holding him in reserve, should Simon fail.



He was sitting by her side, staring at her, and thinking of something to say, when in rushed the Voyt, who had by this time made it up with Boryna. He called out from the very threshold:

"News for you! You are to appear in court to-morrow at noon."

"In the action about my cow?"

"Aye, against the manor."

"I must be off betimes to-morrow; it is a long way. Vitek, go this instant to Pete and get everything ready. You are to go, too, as a witness.—Is Bartek notified?"

"I have brought all the summonses from the court bureau to-day: there will be a lot of you together. And if the manor is at fault, let it pay up."

"Pay it must!—Such a cow as that!"

"Come with me into the other rooms," the Voyt whispered; "I have to talk with you."

They went out, and remained so long that Yuzka had to take supper in to them.

The Voyt, as he had more than once done already, entreated him not to make enemies of the manor folk, to put matters off, see how things would turn out, and beware of joining with Klemba and his party. Boryna had hitherto seemed to waver, calculating chances. He did not refuse to listen, but did not care to join the Voyt's side, still feeling indignant at the slight offered him by the Squire, when he had come to the miller's lately.

Seeing that he made no impression, the Voyt tried alluring him with a bait.

"Ye know that I, with the miller and the smith, have come to an agreement with the manor: that we are to cart the trunks to the saw-mill and, when sawn into planks, to the town."

"Yes, yes, of course I know: tongues wag about it quite enough, and say you prevent folk from earning any money."

"Much do I care! But let me tell you now what we three have settled. Harken to what I say."

The old man shot a glance at him and listened attentively.

"We want you to be one of us. You shall cart the very same quantity of timber. Ye have a good pair of draught-horses, the wagoner will only have to drive, and the profit is certain. Payment is by the cubic metre. You will have earned fivescore roubles ere it be possible to work in the fields."

Boryna pondered long. "When do you begin work?" he asked.

"From to-morrow. They are already cutting down timber in the nearest clearings. The roads are fairly good, sledges being still available. My man is to start off on Thursday."

"A plague upon it! If I but knew whether my action will succeed to-morrow!"

"Only join us, and all will be well.—I, the Voyt, have spoken."

Boryna remained plunged for a while in dubious musings; he eyed the Voyt with attention, chalked something on the bench, scratched his head, and said finally:

"I am with you in this undertaking."

"Good. Come to the miller's to-morrow, after the judgment, and we shall talk the matter over further. I must be off now, to get my sledge-runners tinkered up at the blacksmith's."

Away he went in high glee, assured that he had, by this offer of partnership in cartage, bought the old man over to his side.

Truly, though, the miller might make one with the manor: his land was not on the village register, nor had he any rights over the forest. So too might the Voyt, whose lands had been taken from the clergy by the Russians; so might the smith: but not he, not Boryna! He said: "Cartage is one thing, and the forest dispute is another. Ere an agreement is come to, or we have a complete rupture, many a day must elapse. Why not, then, get my immediate profit out of the partnership, and yet hold fast to our rights? There are, in any case, some scores of roubles of clear gain. I should



have to keep the servant and feed the horses, in any case."

He smiled, rubbed his hands, and chuckled over the situation.

"They have no more sense than so many sheep, thinking to take me in like a silly calf. Silly themselves!"

In rare good humour, he went back to his womenfolk. Yagna was out of the room. She had, they told him, gone out to feed the swine.

He talked gaily, bantered Yasyek and Dominikova, awaiting his wife the while with increasing uneasiness. She was absent very long. Quietly and without a word, he went out into the yard. The lads were in the barn, making ready the sledge for the morrow's ride. He looked into the stables, the byre, the sties: Yagna was nowhere to be seen. For a time he stood waiting under the eaves in the dark. It was a sombre night with a cold howling gale, great dark clouds chasing each other across the sky and, from time to time, some white flakes falling.

Presently a dusky figure loomed in the path beyond the stile. Dashing forward, Boryna leaped the stile, and whispered fiercely:

"Where have you been, say?"

Yagna, though scared, carried it off boldly:

"'Covering my feet.' Would you pry into everything?" she said with a mocking laugh, and went in.

He spoke no more about that; and when they went to bed, he said in a quiet friendly tone, though without raising his eyes:

"Would ye like to go to the Klembas' to-morrow?"

"Surely, along with Yuzka.—Unless ye forbid."

"I must go to the law-court, and leave my house to the care of Providence. It were better ye should stay at home."

"But will ye not be back by dusk?"

"I fear not. Perhaps only late in the night. It looks like snow, and we may have hard work coming home. But if ye will go, you may; I do not forbid you."

## CHAPTER IX

THE snow had been, since early morning, threatening to fall. The day rose, cloudy and very boisterous; grains of snow came down, minute, like unsifted groats; and the gale, gaining in strength as the morning advanced, and constantly changing its direction, howled loud and dismally.

The weather notwithstanding, Hanka had set out with her father and several *Komorniki* immediately after noontide, to get dry wood for fuel in the forest.

The gusts raged over the fields, shaking the trees, blowing clouds of fallen snow into the air again, whistling and shrieking, and casting them down once more, as when a linen cloth, full of white hemp peel, is shaken out. Everything was lost to sight in the raging turmoil.

Once clear of the village, they went forward in single file along the pathways between the sown crops, towards the pine-forest, now scarce visible through the falling snow.

The wind, increasing in intensity, smote upon them from every quarter, dancing wildly round them, and buffeted and struck them so violently that they could hardly stand. They crawled along, bending down towards the ground; while it rushed on, gathered up dry snow mingled with sand, and returned to dash it in their faces.

Slowly they plodded onward, making half-audible sounds, and rubbing their hands with snow; for the piercing frost went through and through their thin garments; and the numerous snow-drifts around the piles of stones or the trees were continually blocking the way, and had to be turned, thus lengthening their journey a good deal.

Hanka walked foremost, often looking back at her father, bowed down, and with his head in a shawl. He was dressed



in a cast-off sheepskin of Antek's, and girt with a band of straw; and he dragged along at the tail, panting, forced every now and then to stop, rest, and wipe his eyes, which were watering with the blast. Then he would hasten on, crying: "I am coming, Hanka, I am coming; fear not, I shall not lag behind."

Certainly he would have much preferred staying in the chimney corner. But when she, poor thing! went out in such weather, how could he remain at home? Besides, it was unbearably cold in the hut; the children shivered and shuddered all the time; they could not cook anything, and ate only dry bread.

Hanka, with set teeth, walked on in front of the *Komor-niki*.—Yes, it had come to that: Filipka, Krakalina, old Kobusova, Magda, Kozlova, the very poorest in the whole place, were now her companions.

She sighed to think of it: yet it was by no means the first time she had been out thus with them.

"Let it be so! Let it be so!" she said in a hard whisper, striving for strength and patience.

Since it had to be, well, she was willing; she would go and seek for firewood along with those paupers, and never weep, nor complain, nor beg anyone to help her.

And, indeed, to whom could she go? They might give her something, but with it also a word of pity . . . such pity as might well wring the life-blood out of the heart! . . . No: the Lord Jesus was trying her, had sent her a cross: perhaps He would reward her ere long. . . . And, in any case, she would bear all—never give way or let anyone pity or mock her!

In these last times, she had suffered so much that every part of her shook with agony, each crushing her with its own particular pang.

It was not because of her poverty and the slights that went with it, the hunger in her cabin, and the food, insufficient even for the children; not because Antek drank his earnings away in the tavern with those boon companions of his, caring nothing for his family, and often (when he had

crept home by stealth, like a vagabond dog) answering any word of remonstrance with a blow. She could forgive all that. "He was out of sorts, and his mood would pass, if she did but wait patiently."—But that he was unfaithful to her, that she could not forget!

No, she could not! What, with a wife and children, yet mindful of neither, and so utterly absorbed in *her*!

The thought tore at her heart like the red-hot pincers of mediæval tortures.

"He loves Yagna, he dotes upon her: she is the cause of all this!"

And the anguish of neglect and scorn and contumely; and her shame, her jealousy, her craving for revenge—all these monsters were incessantly tormenting her and plunging their venomous fangs into her heart!

"Have mercy, O Lord! Spare me, O Jesus!" she would groan in spirit, raising to Heaven those eyes of hers, red with ever-falling tears.

She quickened her pace; the gale was so high upon the hills not yet sheltered by the forest, that she felt intolerably cold. The women with her, on the contrary, slackened their steps and now lagged behind—blurs almost unseen in the mist of swirling whiteness. The forest was near; and when that mist cleared up for an instant, it suddenly appeared on the snowy plain like a huge wall of trunks in serried array.

"Come on faster," she called out impatiently; "we shall rest when we get to the wood."

But they were in no hurry, stopping frequently, and crouching down on the snow, heads away from the wind, like a covey of partridges, while they talked together.

To her call, Filipka answered in surly fashion:

"Hanka is like a dog speeding after a crow—thinks she will get it if she hastes."

"Poor thing!" murmured Krakalina, sympathetically; "how she has come down in the world!"

"Oh, well, she was warm enough at Boryna's, and has tasted good things: let her now taste things that are evil. Some starve all the years of their lives, yet none pities them."



"There was a time when she would not have bid us good day."

"My dear, there is a saying: 'Wealth gives a wreath to the brow; poverty, wings to the feet.'"

"Once I would have borrowed a mallet of her, and she said it was for her own use alone."

"True, open-handed she was not, and she thought not a little of herself, as do all the Boryna folk; but I am sorry for her, nevertheless."

"To be just, that husband of hers is a scoundrel."

"Were it any business of mine, I'd take Yagna to task on the high road, rate her, curse her, and swinge her soundly."

"That too may come to pass—worse still, peradventure."

"The woman's of the brood of Paches. . . . And her mother was just the same in her youth."

"Let us on: the wind is falling, and may go quite down ere nightfall."

Presently they all entered the forest, and separated, but so as to be within call for the home-coming. And the gloomy depths swallowed them up so entirely that they soon could see hardly anything of one another.

It was a vast forest of old pine-trees, all standing close to each other, straight and slender and strong; whose trunks, overgrown with whitish-green lichens, looked like pillars of verdigris-stained copper, peering forth amidst green verdure, flecked with grey, in impenetrable ranks. Chilly mournful sounds rose up from the snow underfoot; overhead, athwart ragged pine-boughs, as through a broken thatch, the sky was visible.

The wind blew above them; but at times all seemed as still as in a church, when the organs suddenly cease to play, and the chants are heard no more, and nothing is audible save deep sighs, the shuffling of feet, the mumbling of prayers in a faint dying hum: so the forest stood motionless, mute, listening, as it were, to a far-away thundering—to the wild cry of the ravaged fields which, rising up from some remote spot, was heard only as a feeble moan.

By and by, however, the gale struck the forest with all its

force—struck against its close-set trunks, assailing its depths, shrieking in its dim nooks, and fighting an army of giants.—Only to be defeated: its might gave way, collapsed, grew weak, died in the compact undergrowth of brushwood. The forest itself was unmoved; not a single branch waved, nor did any trunk vibrate; within, the silence was deeper yet, still more awful; only a bird or two was heard to flutter about in the shadows.

But, now and again, there would come a squall of lightning swiftness and power, like a hungry falcon swooping down upon its prey: it took hold of the tree-tops and, with an overwhelming shock, trampled and crushed and shattered them in roaring frenzy. Then did the forest, as if roused from slumber, wake up and shake itself and, shuddering from one end to the other, rock its trees, swaying with a dull but hurtling and ominous clangor; it rose again, stiffening and straightening itself once more, uttering a terrible cry, and struggling like a wrestler blind and mad with rage; and the hubbub rent the air, and there was fighting within the wood to its innermost depths. Every creature that lurked and dwelt in the thick copses shrank back in dismay to its lair; and, maddened with alarm, the fowls of the air flew wildly about in the midst of the snow-showers and avalanches of broken snapped-off boughs that fell from the tree-tops.

And, after this, there would follow long death-silences, in which heavy thuds were heard afar off.

"They are felling the trees in Vilche Doly; how fast the work goes on!" old Bylitsa murmured, as he gave ear to the dull throbbing sounds.

"Hurry, hurry! we must return before night!"

They plunged into a clump of tall young saplings, where brushwood and scrub had so intermingled their thickly tangled branches that they scarce could force their way through. A sepulchral stillness reigned around; no sound reached there; even light hardly filtered through the thick layer of snow which crusted the trees all over, hanging like a roof overhead. This secluded nook was earthy-ashy grey, very little snow having been wafted to the ground, which was



strewn, knee-deep in places, with dry dead boughs; elsewhere with great masses of green moss; with berry-shrubs, yellow, faded, cowering close to the ground as in fear; and with dried clusters of toadstools.

Hanka went about actively, breaking off the biggest branches she could find, cutting them all to the same length, and then putting them into the open piece of canvas she had brought; working with such ardour that she had to take off her shawl, she felt so warm. In about an hour's time, she had gathered a bundle of faggots so large that she could scarcely lift it. Her father, too, had made a pretty large bundle himself, and tied it up with a cord, dragging it along in search of a tree-stump, where he might with more ease hoist it on to his shoulders.

They called out to the women; but the blast blew so furiously through the vast forest that they could not make them hear.

"Hanka, we must go back by the poplar-road: it will be better than the cut through the fields."

"Come, then. Keep your eyes upon me, and do not lag too much behind."

They at once struck off to the left, through a bit of old oak-forest. But it was hard work getting on, the snow being more than knee-deep here; and now and then came still worse patches, where the leafless trees were scanty and there hung down from the mighty outspread branches huge long beards of caked snow: here and there, too, some slender sapling, covered with a shaggy rusty fell of dead leaves, would bend down, striking the earth in the whistling wind.

It was still blowing hard, with the air so full of snow that there was no going any farther. Old Bylitsa's strength at once gave way, and he came to a standstill. Even Hanka felt exhausted; but she only leaned with her bundle against a tree, and sought for some better road.

"We shall never get through this way. Besides, there is a marsh beyond the oak-forests. Let us go back through the fields."

They somehow made their way back to the great dense pine wood, where it was somewhat less gusty, and the snow less deep. Then they came out upon the fields. But here they were met by such a driving blizzard that they could not see a stone's throw in front of them. The wind was constantly blowing towards the forest, whence driven back as from a wall, it rushed again into the fields, where, strong as ever, it caught up whole hillocks of snow, lifted them bodily into the air like great white clouds, which it again hurled against the trees. How it rushed to and fro in the forest! how it eddied! how fiercely it smote upon them both! and how they all but failed to reach the sown fields! The old man fell to the ground, and she had to help him on, little as she herself was able to keep standing.

Back they went to the forest, where, cowering behind some trees, they took counsel together how to come back; for they could not tell in which direction to turn.

"Along the pathway to the left: then we shall be sure to come out on the poplar-road, just by the cross."

"But I do not see the path at all."

He had to give detailed explanations, for she feared to go the wrong way.

"And can ye tell which way to take?"

"To the left, so far as I can guess."

They trudged along, skirting the wood and a little within it, to be sheltered from the assaults of the gale.

"Come quickly, night is falling fast."

"I will, I will, Hanka; let me but breathe awhile."

But it was no easy matter to win through. The path was not to be seen at all; and besides, a terrible wind assailed them from one side, pouring down avalanches. They took shelter behind trees, crouched under juniper-bushes: all in vain. It pierced to the very marrow of their bones, especially when they passed through some glen: the rustling of the trees then would swell to shrieks, and the whole wood sway and rock till the branches almost touched the ground, lashing their faces at times; and now and then a young tree



would fall with such a crash as one might think only a whole uprooted forest could have made.

On they plodded as best they could, to reach the road soon and be home before night: already the fields were turning grey, and over the snowy wilds long dark streaks, like wreaths of smoke, began to appear.

They got to the road at last and, half dead with weariness, fell on their knees before the crucifix.

It stood at the edge of the forest, close to the highway, sheltered by four huge birch-trees, with their white smocks of bark and boughs which dangled like tresses. On a cross of black wood hung a crucified Christ, made of sheet-iron, and painted with lively glowing colours. The winds had partly torn the figure away, for it was suspended by one arm only, and battered the cross as it swung, creaking rustily, as with an appeal for succour and rescue. The weather-beaten birches would conceal it, as they shook and tossed to and fro; clouds of snow, too, drifted past, hiding it under a white mist, through which occasional glimpses of Christ's livid body and bleeding face were seen, peering forth from that pallid veil, and filling the heart of the beholder with compassion.

On this old Bylitsa gazed with awe and crossed himself, but he durst say nothing; for Hanka's face, set, stern, hard, incomprehensible, was like the night now coming on, with blasts, and dim dark snow-tempests: ominously mysterious.

He thought that she saw nothing, heeded nothing. And indeed she sat lost in dreary thought, always revolving that one fact—that Antek had been unfaithful. Within her there was a tempest of sighs as heart-rending as that body of Christ crucified—of tears frozen to ice, yet still burning her to death—of clamorous outcries which agony was wringing from her young life!

"Shameless! Without any fear of Heaven!—Her son-in-law, guilty of incest!—O God! O God!"

The horror of it swept over her as a hurricane. At first dismayed, she presently seethed with angry resentful emo-

tion—like the forest she had seen bowing to the blast, then rising in fury to resist it.

"Let us go on . . . and faster!" she cried. Lifting her bundle on to her shoulders and bending forwards under it, she went forth into the road, never looking back upon the old man, but urged forward by unquenchable implacable resentment.

"Oh, I will pay you for all this; yea, I will pay you in full!" she said, wailing bitterly in spirit; and the bare poplar-trees wailed along with her, as they did battle with the storm.

"I have enough of this. If my heart were of stone, such a blow would break it! . . . If Antek chooses, let him stay abroad and take his ease in the tavern. But her I do not forgive for the wrong she has done me: I will pay her . . . and in full! Yes, even though I rot in prison for it.—If such were to walk God's earth unpunished, then were there no justice in the world!" . . . Such were her thoughts. But after a while her fury burnt itself out, and grew as pallid as the flowers seen when the window-panes are frosted over. Her strength was now almost entirely spent, her burden crushed her down; the hard knots on the pine-faggots bruised her shoulders, and her back was aching sorely; while her bundle, fixed with a stick across her neck, pulled hard at her throat, choking her so that she trudged on ever more heavily and slowly.

The road was all covered with driven snow, and open to the blasts on every side. The poplars, scarcely visible a few yards away, stood in an interminable row, bowing and bending with fearful cries and shrieks as the wind lashed them; struggling as birds in a snare, that scream and beat their wings in vain convulsive outbursts.

On the uplands, the wind had somewhat abated; but down below, its rage was yet greater than before. Down the road it swept, and on either side, and over the plain, and away in the grey blurred distance. The hurricane still raged here, as in a cauldron: a thousand eddying gusts kept



up a goblin dance; a thousand spheres of snow, wafted off the plain, rolled along like enormous white whirling spindles; thousands of snow-piles went moving over the ground; thousands of ridges undulated forward, growing larger and larger, higher and higher, as if they would reach the sky and hide all things from sight—and then collapsed on a sudden with a tumultuous uproar.

The whole country-side looked like a boiling pan, brimming over with white liquid, bubbling and frothing and foaming and steaming; while, with the night, there came multitudinous voices, rising up from the ground, hissing loud overhead, thunderous afar off: sounds like the swishing and cracking of many whips—forest-music as the organ's low rumbling drone at the Elevation—wild long howls that rent the air—cries as of birds, wandering and lost—horrible noises as of unearthly weeping and sobbing; and then silence again—and then the keen dry whistling of the wind in the poplars, that tossed to and fro in the turbid snow-charged air, like fearful phantoms, raising their arms to Heaven!

And Hanka dragged herself along, almost groping her way from poplar to poplar, often stopping to rest, and listening to those weird voices of the evening.

At the foot of one of those poplars, she saw a hare crouch, dark against the snow. At her approach it fled into the snow-storm, which seized it as with the talons of a bird of prey; and it squealed pitifully in its clutch. Hanka cast a glance of sorrowful compassion at the poor beast as it fled.—She could hardly move now, and with great difficulty lifted one foot after another through the snow. The burden weighed her down inexorably; and she often fancied she was bearing on her back the winter, the snow, the winds—everything, in a word; that she had everlastingly been thus walking on, with her sad, bleeding, weary soul, and would continue thus till Doomsday. The road seemed to be lengthening out endlessly, the weight she bore crushed her; she stopped to rest ever more frequently, and with ever longer halts, half insensible as she was. Her face was burn-

ing: she cooled it with snow, rubbed her eyes, braced herself up as well as she could, and went forward to plunge again into that shrieking, bellowing conflict of the elements. But she wept abundantly; the tears gushed forth from her heart, that deep hidden fountain of sorrow: from the very bottom of her heart thus torn asunder, there came the desperate outcry of a creature hopelessly lost. Yet from time to time she would pray, uttering her prayers in a mournful tone, and breathing them out in detached words and phrases. So will a bird, freezing to death, now and again flap its wings; and then, bereft of all strength, alight upon the ground, hop forward a little, chirp a little, and settle down once more in mortal drowsiness.

And so she again set to hurry on with her last remaining strength, stumbling into snow-drifts, sometimes sticking fast in them, but always going onwards, seized and scourged with a sudden fear and alarm, as she thought of her children.

And now the wind brought her a tinkling sound, and the noise of sledge-runners and men's voices, but so brokenly that, though she stopped to listen, she could not make out one word. Someone, however, was certainly driving in her direction; and at last she saw the horses' heads distinctly through the snow-mist.

"It is father-in-law!" she whispered; for she had made out the white spot on the filly's forehead. Then she waited no longer, but turned round to go on.

She had not been mistaken. Boryna, along with Vitek and Ambrose, was on his way back from the district court. They drove slowly, it being difficult to get through the drifts: in some places they had been forced to alight and lead the horses. They seemed to have been drinking, for they were talking and laughing aloud, Ambrose now and then troling out some snatches of songs.

Hanka got out of their way, and drew her kerchief down over her face, but could not prevent Boryna from recognizing her at once as he drove past, whipping his horses up to get along more quickly. They dashed on, but were stopped!



by another snow-drift. Then he looked round and pulled up. When she was again visible and abreast of his sledge, he called out to her:

"Throw your firewood in behind, and get up here: I'll take you home."

She had been so accustomed to do his bidding that now she did it instinctively.

"Bartek has given a lift to Bylitsa, who was sitting and weeping under a tree; they are close behind us."

She answered nothing, but looked round gloomily at the raging chaos of night and snow-storm as she dropped into the front seat, as yet only half conscious. Boryna eyed her with careful scrutiny. She looked so wretched that now she was a painful sight, with her livid frost-bitten face, and eyes swollen with tears, and her mouth set in firm resolve. Shivering with cold and weariness, she vainly tried to wrap herself up in her tattered shawl.

"Ye ought to beware: in such a condition, an illness might easily take you."

"And who will work in my stead?"

"What! go to the forest in such weather as this?"

"We had no more fuel at all, and could not cook our meals."

"Are your little ones well?"

"Little Peter was ill for a fortnight, but has quite recovered now, and could eat twice as much as I give him," she answered, now at her ease and recovering from her state of prostration. Throwing her shawl back, she looked him calmly in the face, without any of the scared meekness of former times. The old man guessed that a transformation had taken place in her, and wondered at it greatly: she was no longer at all the Hanka of old. A sort of glacial repose was now to be felt in her, and her compressed lips told of inflexible firmness and strength. He no longer frightened her as of old; she spoke to him as to an equal and a stranger, without either complaint or reproach; she answered simply and to the point, in a voice which spoke of much suffering

endured, with a certain hardness in her tone which the tempering fire of hidden anguish had wrought; only the gleam of her tearful azure eyes still betrayed an intensely emotional soul.

"Ye have greatly changed."

"Suffering shapes the soul as the smith shapes iron—and sooner."

Her reply amazed him so, he could find nothing to say to it, and turned round to Ambrose to talk about the lawsuit with the manor. In spite of the Voyt's promise, he had lost, and had to pay costs into the bargain.

"I shall," he said confidently, "appeal and succeed."

"That will be hard. The manor-folk have long arms, and manage to succeed everywhere."

"Against them too there's a way—as there always is, if one waits patiently for the right moment."

"You are right, Matthias; but oh, how cold it is! Let's go to the tavern and warm ourselves."

"Very well.—Having spent so much, I can spend a little more.—But ye should know that only a blacksmith should 'strike while the iron's hot.' The man who would overcome must take happenings coolly, and possess his soul in patience."

By the time they had come to the village, the twilight had deepened into thick darkness, and in the dusky air the houses they passed by were indistinguishable; but the storm was slowly subsiding.

Boryna stopped the horses at the path to Hanka's cabin, and got down to help her to get the bundle on her back; when she had alighted, he said in her ear:

"Come round and see me—to-morrow, if you like. I know you are badly off; that scoundrel drinks away all his earnings, leaving you and the children to starve."

"But ye drove us out; how can I dare return?"

"You speak foolishly.—I tell you, come!"

Choking with emotion, she kissed his hand, unable to utter a word.



"Will you come?" he asked, in a strangely kind and tender voice.

"I will, and thankfully; since ye order me, I will come."

He whipped the horses up, and at once turned off to the tavern: while Hanka, not waiting for her father, who was just alighting from Bartek's sledge, hastened back to her hut.

It was dark as pitch there, and seemed even colder than out of doors. The children slept curled up in the feather-bed. She set busily about to make the fire and prepare supper, but was all the while full of her extraordinary meeting with Boryna.

"No! Were he on his death-bed, I must not go: Antek would make me pay too dear!" she cried out angrily. But other thoughts succeeded presently, some of revolt against her husband.

Had anyone in the world made her suffer so much as he?

True, Boryna had made over land to that swinish woman, and had driven them away. But Antek had fought with him first, and had been continually snarling at him, so that the old man lost patience. So long as he lived, he had the right to do with his own land as he pleased.—And how tenderly he had asked her to come just now! . . . and inquired about the children, and everything!—Yes, and never, had not Antek gone after that woman, would there have been half this misery and humiliation. . . . That at least was not in any wise the old man's fault.

And as she went on musing, her resentment against Boryna began to abate.

In then came Bylitsa, half frozen and terribly exhausted. He had to warm himself by the fire for an hour at least, before he could say how he had been unable to go any farther, and possibly might have been frozen to death under that tree but for Boryna.

"He saw me, and would have put me on his sledge; but when I said you were on the road ahead, he left me to Bartek, and drove on to catch up with you."

"Was it so? He never told me that."

"He is not a hard man really, but would have folk think he is."

After supper, when the children had eaten as much as they could, and were tucked up in bed again and asleep, Hanka sat down by the fireside to spin what remained of the organist's wool; and her father still continued warming himself, looking timidly at her, clearing his throat, and gathering courage to speak; which he did at last, though with great hesitation.

"Prithee make it up with him. Think, not of Antek, but of yourself and the children."

"That is easy to say."

"Boryna himself made the first advances. . . . And see: his home is now become a hell. . . . He will surely thrust Yagna away from him; if not at once, he will very shortly. . . . Yuzka can never manage so large an establishment.—If, when that comes to pass, you have found favour in his eyes, it were well. . . . You can render him many a service, and in good season . . . we know not what may happen . . . he may ask you to return . . ."

As he spoke, she let the spindle go and, with her head propped on the top of her distaff, began to think this over and reflect upon her father's advice.

He was now preparing to go to bed, but asked her, in a confidential tone:

"Did he talk to you by the way?"

She told him all.

"Pray go to him, my daughter; go to-morrow morning; go, run to him, since he calls for you. Think but of yourself and of the children. . . . Be on the old man's side, and kind to him. Be like the docile calf, which, folk say, 'thrives, sucks much milk, and waxes stout.'—Remember that 'spite never yet brought success to any man.'—As to Antek, he will return to you. He is now possessed of a devil, and driven to and fro by him; but this will leave him soon, and he will come back to you. Our Lord is watching to deliver you from all these woes in His own good time."

He spent much time exhorting and trying to convince



her; but she made no reply. Disappointed, he said no more, but went to bed and lay silent. Hanka went on spinning and pondering his words.

From time to time she rose to see whether Antek was coming. Nothing was to be heard.

She worked, but did not get on well. The thread would break, or the spindle slip from her hand, because she was turning Boryna's words over in her mind.

Peradventure it might prove true: the hour might strike when he would call her back again!

And by slow, slow degrees there grew up in her mind the desire—feeble at first, at last invincible—for peace and reconciliation with Boryna.

"We three are destitute: there will be a fourth presently . . . and what shall I do then?"

She no longer took Antek into account, but considered herself and children, and felt she must decide for them all—must and would.

If she could but once more get back that position of housewife at Boryna's and feel ground again, she thought, she would take up her duties so thoroughly and earnestly that nothing should ever prevent their perfect fulfilment. and hope grew within her heart, and waxed so great, and filled her with such strength and energy and courage, that her eyes flashed at the thought, and she felt all on fire.

For a long space she enjoyed this waking dream of hers—perhaps till midnight—and made up her mind to go to Boryna the next day, and take the children along with her, though Antek might forbid, and even beat her. She would not obey him, but take the opportunity offered and go: she was now aware of unconquerable power in herself, and felt ready to fight the whole world, if she must.

Once more she looked out of doors. The wind had quite gone down; in the black night, the snow appeared dark grey. Huge clouds passed in the sky, like rolling waters; and out of the far-off woods, and from the invisible shadows, there came a feeble murmur.

Having put the light out and said her prayers, she began to undress.

Suddenly a distant stifled noise rose out of the silence around her, quivering,—grew stronger and stronger, and at the same time a ruddy glow shone athwart the panes.

She ran out in terror.

Somewhere in the midst of the village, a conflagration had broken out: a column of flame rose up, with smoke and a swarm of sparks.

The alarm-bell sounded presently, and the cries rang louder.

"Up! Up! There's a fire!" she screamed to Staho in the other lodgings, dressed in a hurry, and rushed forth into the road, where she was met by Antek, running from the village.

"Where's the fire?"

"Can't tell.—Go in!"

"It may be at Father's . . . 'tis somewhere very nigh!" she stammered, mortally afraid.

"Blood of a dog! get in!" he bellowed, thrusting her into the hut by main force.

He was covered with blood, bare-headed; his sheepskin was rent in two, his face blackened and grimy, and his eyes glowed like a madman's.



## CHAPTER X

ON that same day, when work was over and the evening well on towards night, they began to drop in at Klemba's for the grand spinning-party.

Dame Klemba had invited elderly women, for the most part, kinswomen or good friends of hers, and they had all come in proper time, as careful not to be late as not to disregard the invitation.

First of all, according to her custom, came Vahnikova, plentifully supplied with wool, and carrying several spindles under her arm. Then Golab, Matthew's mother, with a vinegar-face, always bound up, who always complained of everything; after her, Valentova the talkative—a huffy woman who cackled like a hen; and Sikora's wife, a terrible gossip, thin as a broomstick, and much interested in all her neighbours' quarrels. And then rolled in Ploshka's wife, tubby, red-faced, plethoric, always over-dressed, high and mighty to everybody, and gifted with rare powers of speech, which made her generally disliked. Afterwards there quietly slipped in Balcerkova, skinny, undersized, withered, and sly; an ill-tempered woman, and such a lawsuit-maker that she was on fighting terms with half the village, and went to the law-courts every month. And now boldly stepped in (uninvited, indeed) the woman Kobus, Voytek's wife, so malicious a gossip and so rank a shrew that folk shunned her friendship as they would fire. Also came, breathing heavily and in a hurry, Gregory's wry-mouthed wife, a drunkard, a cheat, and given to practical jokes—especially such as did harm to her neighbours. Then old Sohova (Klemba's son-in-law's mother), a very quiet woman, most religious, and (Dominikova excepted) the one who spent most time in church. There were others also, too

139 WINTER  
hard to describe, being as like one another as geese in a flock, and indiscernible, save by their attire. All these came—an assembly of matrons, each bringing with her something or other: wool or flax to spin, or hurds; some with linen to sew, or feathers to make up for bedding—not willing to be seen empty-handed, as if they had only come to talk.

They formed a large circle in the centre of the room, under a lamp that hung from the ceiling; and they looked like a clump of bushes, well-grown, mature, and blighted by late autumn; for all were elderly, and all about the same age.

Klembova welcomed them all with the same friendly greeting, but spoke low; she was short of breath, her lungs being in a bad state. Klemba, as a good sensible man, who loved to be on pleasant friendly terms with everybody, said some kind words to each, and set the tables and benches for them himself.

Yagna arrived somewhat later, with Yuzka and Nastka, and a few other girls, together with a sprinkling of young men who dropped in subsequently.

It was a big gathering. The winter was a hard one, and the days irksome to pass. People cared little to go to bed as fowls to roost; that would give them overmuch time to lie in bed till daybreak, and make their sides ache with weariness.

They seated themselves, some on benches, others on chests. Klemba's sons, too, brought in tree-stumps from the yard for the boys to sit down upon, and there was room enough for all. The hut, though of no height, was very large, built in the old style, most likely by Klemba's great-great-grandfather, and a hundred and fifty years old or more. It was already tottering with age, leaning slantwise like a stooping old man; in places, the thatched eaves almost touched the hedge beneath, and had to be propped up.

After a time, the talk grew louder and more general, while the spindles twirled and whirled and hummed on the floor, and a spinning-wheel buzzed here and there.

Klemba's sons were four: tall slender striplings, with bud-



ding moustaches. They sat close to the door, engaged in twisting ropes of straw. The other young fellows were sitting in corners, smoking cigarettes, grinning and joking with the lasses, and making them giggle till the room rang again.

At last Roch, whom they had long expected, came in, followed by Matthew.

"Is it windy still?" someone asked.

"No wind at all; the weather will change."

"It surely is going to thaw," Klemba added; "we hear the forest moaning."

Roch, who now taught a class at the Klembas', and lodged and boarded there, sat down to eat at a separate table. Matthew greeted some of the company, but did not so much as glance at Yagna, whom he made out he had not seen, although she was straight in front of him. At that she smiled faintly, with her eyes fixed on the entrance door.

"Well, it has been blowing all day long, Heaven preserve us!" Sohova said. "Some women have crept back from the forest, half dead; and they say Hanka and her father, who were among them, are missing."

"Ah, yes," Kobusova grunted. "'Wherever the poor man goes, the wind against him blows.'"

"Alas! Hanka has come down indeed . . ." Ploshkova was beginning to say, but stopped and talked of something else on seeing how red Yagna had turned.

"Has not Yagustynka been here?" Roch inquired.

"She is not wanted: our company takes no pleasure in slandering and backbiting."

"A wicked hag she is! This very day she set the Voyt and the Soltys' wives so by the ears that they fell to railing and would have fought, had not the company prevented them."

"That's because they let her talk as she pleases."

"And there's no one to pay her out for her spiteful words and mischief-making."

"Yet all know what she is: why listen to her snarls?"

"True: we never know when she is lying and when not."

"They let her, because they all enjoy hearing her talk against someone else," Ploshka's wife concluded.

Teresa, a soldier's wife, here called out: "Let her say one word against me! She would pay it dear!"

Whereupon Balcerek's wife said to her, sarcastically:

"Why, is she not telling tales against you in the village all day long?"

"Repeat—repeat them, whatsoever ye have heard!" she shouted, flushing crimson: it was a matter of general knowledge that she was on exceedingly intimate terms with Matthew.

"I will, and to your face, when your goodman is back from the army."

"Beware what ye say of me! What, will ye babble and gabble here?"

"Wherefore scream, when none accuses you!" Ploshka's wife cried out in rebuke; but Teresa was not soon appeased, and she muttered to herself for a good while.

"Have they been here, with the 'bear?'" Roch asked, to change the subject.

"They are at the organist's now, and will be here at once."

"Who are the performers?"

"Why, the sons of Gulbas and Filipka; who but they, the rogues!"

"Here they come!" the lasses cried. In front of the cabin, a long-drawn roar resounded; then various animals' cries: cocks crowing, sheep bleating, horses whinnying: all this to the accompaniment of a fife. Finally, the door opened, and a young fellow came in, clad in a sheepskin coat, turned inside out, and a tall fur cap, with his face so blackened, he looked like a gipsy. He came pulling the "bear" in question after him by a rope, covered all over with shaggy brown pea-straw, save for a head of fur with paper ears that he could shake at will, and a tongue that hung out for more than a foot. To his arms were fastened staves with pea-straw twisted round them, so that he seemed



to go on all fours. After him went the other bear-leader, wielding a straw lash in one hand, and in the other a club that bristled all over with sharp pegs, to which bits of fat bacon, loaves and bulky packets were stuck. In the rear walked Michael, the organist's boy, playing the fife, and a number of youngsters with sticks, tapping on the floor and shouting vociferously.

The bear-leader "praised God," crowed, bleated, neighed like a rampant stallion, and, lifting up his voice, spoke thus:

"We, bear-leaders, come from a foreign clime, beyond the ocean and the endless forests, where men walk upside down, use sausages for palings, and fire to cool themselves; where pots are set to boil in the sun, and where the sky rains vodka: thence have we brought this savage bear! It has been told us that there are in this village wealthy husbandmen, good-natured housewives—and fair maidens too. And therefore from that foreign clime have we come, beyond the Danube, to obtain kind treatment, have our needs supplied, and something given us for our pains!—Amen."

"Show, then, what ye can do," said Klemba; "peradventure there may be something for you in the larder."

"Instantly.—Ho, play the fife there; and you, bear, dance!" the bear-leader cried. Then the fife poured forth one of its sweetest tunes, and the lads tapped the floor with their sticks, and shouted loudly in cadence, while the leader mimicked the voices of many a beast, and the "bear" jumped about as on all fours, twitching his ears, putting his tongue out and in again, and running after the girls. The bear-leader seemed to be pulling him back, and struck with his lash at everyone within his reach, crying:

"Have found no husband yet, lass?—A rope's end you shall get, lass!"

The noise in the room, with the racket and scampering and squealing, waxed louder and louder; and the merriment grew to its height, when the bear began to frolic wildly, rolling on the floor, roaring, leaping for fun, and catching at the girls with his long wooden arms, making them dance to the tunes

played on Michael's fife: the two bear-leaders, meanwhile, and the lads who accompanied them, making such an uproar that the old cabin might well have fallen to pieces with the horse-play and the din and fun of it.

Then, Klemba's wife having treated them very bountifully, they left the place; but far along the road came the sound of shouting men and barking dogs.

"Who played the bear?" Sohova asked, when they had quieted down.

"Could ye not find out? Why, Yasyek Topsy-turvy."

"How could I know him, with that shaggy head of fur?"

"My dear," Kobusova observed, "for such games as that, the doodle has quite enough sense."

"Yasyek is not such a fool as ye make him out to be!" said Nastka, taking his part. No one contradicted her; but sly significant smiles flickered on many faces. They again sat down and began chattering merrily. The girls, headed by Yuzka, who was the least shy of them all, crowded round the fire-place where Roch sat, coaxing and teasing him to tell them some such story as he had told at Boryna's in the autumn.

"Well, Yuzka, do you remember the tale I told you then?"

"Certainly: 'twas about the Lord Jesus and His dog Burek."

"If ye care, I will tell this evening about our kings of old."

They placed a stool for him beneath the lamp, made a circle round him, and he sat in their midst like an old hoary oak in a clearing, compassed about with a clump of many bushes. He spoke deliberately and in a quiet voice.

A hush fell upon them all; only the spindles hummed on, and the logs crackled now and again upon the hearth. And Roch told them many a marvellous tale: of the kings and the bloody wars of old; of the mountains amidst which there now sleeps an army of enchanted warriors, awaiting but the sound of the trumpēt to start up and fall on the foe and purge the land of evil; of the great castles, in whose golden chambers white-clad enchanted princesses, expect-



ing their deliverer, mourn in the moonlit nights; and of those where music is heard nightly in the empty rooms, and multitudes assemble there to dance, who at cock-crow vanish and go back to their tombs. They listened; the spindles no longer twisted under their fingers; their minds went forth into that world of marvels, and their eyes flashed, and tears of ineffable rapture welled up, their hearts well-nigh bursting their bosoms with longing and amazement.

Roch wound up by telling them of a king nicknamed by his nobles the "Peasant King," because he was humane, just and good to all folk alike; of his terrible wars, and of his wanderings in the disguise of a peasant, when he went about the land and lived with his people as a brother, so that he knew of the evil things done, and could redress the wrongs; and how, after that, that he might be yet more at one with the peasants, he married a husbandman's daughter, Sophia by name, who dwelt nigh Cracow; and, taking her to the castle in that city, he reigned there for many years, the father of his people, and the best husbandman in the country.

To all this they listened with rapt attention, not missing one word, and even holding their breath for fear of interrupting the stream of wonders told them. As to Yagna, she was now quite unable to spin any more; her hands had fallen to her sides, and with head bowed and one cheek pressed on the top of her distaff, she fixed her turquoise-blue eyes on Roch's face. He seemed to her like a saint, come out of a picture-frame; so holy he looked, with his grey hair, his long white beard, and those pale eyes of his that seemed to be gazing at something far away. She listened with all her might—the might of an exceedingly impressionable heart—so earnestly taking in all he said, that emotion hardly suffered her to breathe. His words brought everything plainly before her mind's eye; and where he led, she too followed in spirit.—What struck her most of all was his tale about the king and his peasant queen; oh, how beautiful she thought it!

"And did the king himself live so—together with the peasants?" Klemba asked, after a long silence.

"He did."

"Lord!" whispered Nastka; "if a king spoke to me, I should die of fear!"

"And I would follow him all over the world to get one word from him . . . one word!" Yagna cried, passionately.

They then put many a question to Roch. Where could those castles be found? and that army? and those great riches and beautiful things? and those kings, so mighty?—where?

He answered, somewhat sadly, but with wisdom, pointing out to them so many a deep truth and holy maxim that they all sighed, and fell to reflecting on the ways of God's providence in this world.

"Yes," said Klemba, "to-day is ours; to-morrow belongs to the Lord!"

But Roch was tired, and needed some rest. As all were highly interested in the wonderful tales told, each began, at first in whispers, and then aloud, to tell of such things as they too had heard.

One told one tale, another a second, and this reminded a third of something else, each bringing in a fresh point of interest. So the tales glided on like spun threads, and softly as the moonbeams that light up the dead dark waters in the secret woodlands.—They told how a drowned woman came back to suckle her hungry babe, whose cries had drawn her; and how an aspen stake must be thrust through the heart of a vampire in its coffin, that it may not come out to suck human blood any more; how there are noonday phantoms that lurk in lanes between fields, to strangle children. They spoke of talking trees, of horrible midnight spectres, of hanged men, of witches, of bound souls, doing penance upon earth—and of many another weird and awful thing that made the hair to stand on end, the heart to faint with horror, and all that heard to shudder, frozen with dread. Then they sat mute, looking apprehensively



one at the other, and lending an ear: they fancied someone was walking about the loft over the ceiling, or lurked hid outside the windows; that glaring eyes glowed upon them through the panes, or dim shadowy forms skulked in nooks and corners; and more than one made the sign of the cross, and said prayers with chattering teeth. But this mood was swift to pass away, like a cloud, when it has glided over the sun and one has forgotten that it ever was there. And they then set once more to chatter and spin long, long yarns, which Roch heard attentively, till at last he joined their talk, and related a certain fable about a horse.

"Once upon a time, a poor five-acre husbandman possessed a horse, whose nature was slothful and evil beyond words. He was good to it, but that was of no use; he fed it well, but it never was pleased. And it would do no work at all, but pulled its harness to pieces, and lashed out so viciously that no one could go near it. . . . At last its master, seeing that kindness was of no avail, grew mightily angry and, harnessing the horse to a plough, set it to till a field that had long lain fallow, thinking to wear it out thereby, and weary it into obedience. It refused to draw; then he gave it so sound a flogging as made it submit and work. But it thought it had been grievously ill-used, and the memory rankled, with craving to be revenged at a convenient season. And when the husbandman one day had stooped down to set its hind legs free, crash! the horse's hoofs struck out and killed him on the spot; and it set off to roam the world at liberty.

"Throughout the summer, things went fairly well with him. He lay in the shade, or ate the corn on strangers' lands. But winter came round, the snow fell, there was little to eat, and he was pinched with cold. Therefore he went farther and farther away to get food. He had to run day and night, the wolves following him close and often biting his flanks very deep.

"Away he ran, and ran, and ran, even to the confines of the winter—to a meadow where the weather was warm, the grass knee-deep and over, and streamlets sparkled in the

sun, with cool shadows moving to and fro upon their banks, and a pleasant breeze blowing over them. He went to eat that grass, for he was famishing: but, whenever he thought to get a mouthful, it was only a mouthful of hard stones he got: the grass had disappeared. Then he would fain taste some water: it was there no more, but only stinking mire in its stead! He sought the shade to lie down: it floated away, and he was burned and baked by the sun.—Then he would have returned to the forests: they too had vanished! The poor horse neighed in distress, and other horses answered him; and, following the sound, he at last got beyond the meadow and came to a great farm-house. All of silver it seemed to be, its panes as of precious jewels, its thatch like the star-studded sky; and several folk were there, going to and fro. He crawled after them, for now he was willing to labour, no matter how hard, rather than die miserably of hunger. But he lingered on all day in the heat, and no one came to put a halter on him. At evening, however, someone came out: it was the farmer. Now He was the Lord Jesus, the Great Husbandman, the Holiest! and He said:

“‘You lazy one, you that have slain a man, you have naught to do here. Not till they that curse you now shall bless you, will I admit you into My stable.’

“‘I did but strike him back, because he beat me.’

“‘For that beating he has answered to Me; but I hold all justice in My hands.’

“‘I am so starved!’ the horse whinnied, ‘so thirsty! so tormented with pain!’

“‘I have spoken. Away! and I will command the wolves to harry and pursue you.’

“So back went the horse to the land of winter, and dragged himself along in hunger and cold and exceeding great fear; for the wolves—the hounds of the Lord, as it were—hunted him on continually, and scared him with their howls. At last, one spring night, he stood before the gate of his master’s dwelling-house, where he neighed, expecting to be received.



"But at that sound the widow and her children rushed out, and, snatching up sticks, staves and cudgels, they beat him cursing him the while for his evil deed, whereby they had come to great misery and destitution.

"Then went he back to the woods, knowing not what else to do. The wild beasts came up against him, and he did not defend himself, for he now thought death as good as life. Howbeit, they only touched his sides, and the chief amongst them said:

"'Lo, you are too thin—naught but skin on your bones! Eat you we will not, nor wear out our teeth to no purpose: but we shall take pity on you, and help you.'

"They took him with them, and the next morning led him to his master's fields, and put him to the plough that was standing there.

"'They will plough with you, and make you wax stout; and in the autumn we shall come and unharness you!' So they spake.

"The widow came to the field later; but though she cried, 'A miracle!' seeing him back and about to plough, the bitter memory of what he had done soon made her revile him and beat him as hard as she could. And this she did the next day, and after, continually punishing him for his crime. All the summer he toiled hard and in patience, knowing that he suffered justly. Only after several years, when the widow had taken another husband, and also purchased some more land from a neighbour, did she relent towards the horse, saying unto him:

"'You did us a grievous wrong; but since by your means the Lord has blessed us with good harvests, and I have got an able husband, and have bought some fields, I fully and freely forgive you.'

"And behold, in that same night, while they were celebrating a christening-feast, the wolves, messengers of our Lord, came, took that horse out of the stable, and led him to the fields of Paradise."

They wondered exceedingly at the narrative, and were greatly exercised, thinking how the Lord always punishes

evil and rewards good deeds, and watches carefully over all things, as this tale about the horse clearly showed.

"Not even the worm that bores in this wall is hidden from His eyes."

"Nor even," Roch swiftly added, "is any most secret thought concealed from Him, nor any foul desire."

Yagna started at the words; for Antek had just come in, though noticed by few. Valentova was at the time relating such wonders about an enchanted princess, that the spindles ceased from turning, and all sat motionless, listening in charmed silence.

And thus they spent that bleak February evening.

All their minds were on fire, and blazed like roaring resinous faggots; murmurs of emotional outbursts—fancies, dreams, desires—fluttered about the cabin like butterflies—living, flying flowers.

They wove themselves such a web of marvels—so bright with changing prismatic hues—that for the moment it quite shut out the sad, grey, miserable world they lived in.

They went a-roaming over dark plains, lit up with phantom lights; by silver streams, where eerie songs and mysterious calls and gurgling ripples resounded; through vast woods, full of glamour—of knights, of giants, of castles haunted by spectres, of dragons breathing flames. They stood horror-struck at those crossways where vampires screech with laughter; where they that have hanged themselves utter the sobs of the lost; and where the souls of unchristened children flit and hover on bats' wings. They wandered through dim burying-places, following the shades of such as do penance for self-murder; they listened to uncanny voices in ruins of castles and churches; saw fearful visions of terror pass by in endless procession; were present at battles fought; and looked beneath the waters, where the swallows sleep together in long festoons, to be waked each springtime at the Blessed Virgin's call, who gives them to the world again!

Heaven and hell they passed through—through the dark shadows of the wrath of God, and through the radiance of



His tender mercy; through ineffable regions and times of raptures, marvels, miracles; through worlds never seen but in hours of ecstasy, or in dreams—when man looks and gazes, is dizzy and spellbound, and knows not whether he is still in this world or in the next!

It was then that, like an ocean before them, there arose an impassable barrier—a barrier of enchantments and bright wonders—between them and the real world, making it fade away, with the cabin, and the thick black night—this world of troubles, miseries, wrongs, tears, unfulfilled desires—and opening their eyes to that other world, far more majestic and beautiful than tongue can tell!

They had entered the world of the Fabulous; the life of the Fabulous surrounded them with its rainbow tints; the fables of Dreamland had become realities for them. They were dying with a rapture in which they yet found a new life—the great new life, abounding and sacred, merged and plunged in the Miraculous: wherein all trees speak, all stones are animated, all woods enchanted, and every sod of ground instinct with unknown force: wherein all things great and invisible and superhuman live their life—the sublime life of the Inconceivable.

With uttermost longing and a yearning of ecstasy did they aspire towards that life, uniting all things with its in-frangible chain—fancy and reality, prodigy and wishes—in a bewildering procession of dream-existences, for which, under the miserable conditions of their earthly days, their weary crippled souls were insatiably pining.

And indeed, what was that life of theirs, so dull, so squalid? what was that daily round of deeds, so like the glances of a sick man, veiled in the mists of suffering?—Mere darkness—a sad tedious night, during which, except at the hour of death, no such marvels were ever to be seen with the bodily eyes.

As a beast of burden beneath the yoke, so livest thou, O man! caring only to get through this thy present day, and never thinking of what surrounds thee—what incense-

perfumes—and from what most sacred altars—fill the world—nor what hidden prodigies are lurking everywhere!

O man! thou seest no more than doth a rock beneath deep waters! O man! who in darkness ploughst the field of life, thou sowest it but with tears and trouble and sorrow!

And this thy starlike soul, O man! thou lettest it wallow in the marsh and the quagmire! . . .

The conversation went on, and Roch willingly joined in it, always full of wonder and sorrow and tears, when others wondered and sorrowed and wept. . . .

From time to time, there would be long pauses, in which you might almost hear the throbbing of hearts ready to burst, and you could see how their moist eyes glistened, shining with dewy tears; while exclamations of wonder and longing arose, and their souls knelt down before the Lord, in this His temple of marvels, and sang the great hymn of thanksgiving. This all their hearts were singing, filled with ecstasy, trembling, in the mystic communion of the Ideal; like the earth, when it thrills in spring beneath the sunbeams; like the waters at evening, when the day is calm and quiet, and vibrations and iridescent tints play all over them; or like the young corn in an afternoon of early May, murmuring continuously and gently waving delicate blades and feathery ears in a prayer of thanks.

Yagna was in heaven. So deeply did she feel and realize all these things that they stood before her in concrete form and shape, and she was able to cut them out in paper without any difficulty. They handed her some sheets, written over by the children whom Roch was teaching; and while she listened to the legends and stories, she snipped out, now spectres, now kings, or vampires, or dragons, or any other wonderful things, so well cut that they were recognized without fail. So many did she cut out that a whole beam might have been pasted over with her handiwork; and she painted them all with raddle that Antek passed to her. So absorbed was she in her work and the legends she was listening to, that



she failed to notice him, as he stood there impatient, trying to draw her attention; nor did the others, who were also deeply interested, remark the signs he made.

On a sudden, the dogs outside fell to barking furiously, and howling as if in dread, till one of Klemba's sons went out to them. He said on his return that he had seen a peasant outside the window, who had run away.

No one either paid heed to what he had said or remarked that later, when the dogs had ceased barking, a face passed swiftly outside the window, and vanished. Only one girl saw it, and screamed out, rolling her eyes in terror.

"Someone has just gone by—there—there—in the yard!"

"Yes, I hear feet scrunching through the snow!"

"And there's a scraping noise along the wall!"

"Talk of the wolf . . . it is sure to appear!"

A panic came over them, and now they sat terror-struck, motionless with dread.

"Ah!" someone said in a terrified whisper, "we were speaking of the Evil One—and perhaps we have called him up—and he may even now be on the watch for one of us!"

"Jesu Maria!" they exclaimed in horror.

"Just take a look outside, boys, will you? 'Tis but the dogs playing about in the snow."

"Oh, but I saw him too plain through the window—his head as big as a barrel, and eyes like burning coals!"

"Ye saw not well," said Roch, and, seeing that no one cared to go into the yard, he went himself to calm them.

"I will tell you a tale about the Blessed Virgin," he said on his return, "and all your fancies will vanish away." He seated himself in his former place; his coolness somewhat quieted them.

"It was long, long ago, ages ago; so long ago that the tale is found only in very ancient books. In a certain village, hard by Cracow, there dwelt a free peasant, Casimir by name, and surnamed 'the Hawk.' His family, a good one, had dwelt there from all time, and he tilled many a thirty-five-acre piece of land. He had a forest of his own,

a dwelling like a manor, and water-mill close to the river. Our Lord had blessed him, and all went well with him; his barns were always full of corn as his money-box was of money; his children were blooming, his wife was without reproach, and he himself a wise and kindly man, not proud of heart, and just towards everyone.

"He ruled like a father in the assembly, always for justice, anxious to be upright in all things, and ever the first to help and save his neighbours.

"So he lived, soberly, quietly and happily, as one having the Lord God at his fireside.

"Now one day the King sent to call the nation to war against the Paynim.

"The Hawk was sorely troubled at heart, for he had no wish to leave his home and go out to the wars.

"But then, there was the King's messenger standing at the door, and calling him to hasten.

"It was a very great war. The Turks, a vile brood! had entered Poland, burning villages, robbing churches, slaying priests, and putting the people to death, or driving them, bound with cords, to their own country of infidels.

"To fight them was a duty. If, to defend his home and kin, men and country, a man shall willingly lay down his life, he is sure of eternal salvation.

"So he called the assembly, selected the stoutest and bravest men he could find; and on the morrow, after Holy Mass, all set out, some on horseback, others in chariots.

"The whole village went with him, with tears and great lamentations, as far as the statue of Our Lady of Cheshnovah, which stands by the road, at the crossway.

"He fought for a year, for two years . . . but at last no news of him came any more.

"And when all the others had been back a long time, the Hawk was still far away. So they thought he must have been either slain or taken captive by the Turks; moreover, the *Dziads* and wanderers who passed by said secretly much that made them think so.



"At length, at the end of the third year, he came back one day in early spring; but all alone, without henchmen or horses or chariots, in great poverty, and bearing a staff like a beggar.

"He knelt down before the statue of the Blessed Virgin, thanking her for his return to his own country; then he made for the village, walking with swift steps.

"But none welcomed him, none knew who he was; and the dogs attacked him, and he drove them off.

"He arrived at his home . . . rubbed his eyes . . . crossed himself . . . and knew not what it meant.

"Jesu Maria!—No granaries, no orchards, no hedges even! and of live stock, not a single head.—Of his cabin, there remained only the scorched and ruined walls.—No children either! All was utterly destroyed. His wife rose at his approach from a pallet of straw where she lay sick and in pain, and she burst into most bitter tears!

"He stood thunder-struck.

"It had come to pass, while he was fighting and putting to flight the enemies of the Lord, that the plague had entered his cabin, and cut off all his children, and the lightning had struck it and burned it down, and the wolves had eaten his cattle. Then his neighbours seized upon his lands, the corn had perished by drought, the rest of the crops by hail-storms: and naught remained to him.

"Down he dropped on the threshold, ghastly as one dead. But when evening fell, and the bell rang for the Angelus, he started up, and began to curse and blaspheme in an awful voice!

"'Had he shed his blood in God's service for this? for this defended God's churches?'

"In vain his wife tried to calm him; in vain she fell at his feet and entreated him: he continued to curse and blaspheme.

"'What! had he suffered wounds, and hunger, and been honest and pious for this? No matter what he had been, the Lord God had forsaken him, and decreed he should lose all!'

"Most foully did he curse the name of God, and cry that now he would give himself to Satan, who alone did not forsake the wretches that call upon him.

"At those words, behold, Satan appeared before him!

"The Hawk, being very wroth, was now reckless, and cried out:

"'O devil, if you can help me, do; for I have been dealt with most grievously!'

"Fool that he was, and unable to understand that this was all but a trial, whereby our Lord would prove him!

"'I will aid you,' Satan hissed; 'but will you give up your soul to me?'

"'I will—this instant!'

"So a compact was written, and signed with Casimir's blood.

"From that day forth, all things began to mend. He himself did but little, only ordering and overseeing things. Michalek (for so the devil chose to be called) worked for him, helped by other devils, disguised as farm-servants or as Germans; and in a short time the farm was in better order, larger and more flourishing than it ever had been.

"Only there came no more children to them. For how, indeed, could they come to a home so unblessed as that?

"This mortified the Hawk exceedingly. Also by night he was wrung at the thought how he should support the everlasting fire of hell.

"But Michalek took upon him to say that all rich folk—lords, kings, men of learning, yea, and even such bishops as were mighty on earth—had sold their souls to him. And yet none of them cared for what might come to them after death, and thought only of making merry and tasting all the pleasures of this life to the full.

"Then was Casimir more at ease, and he became a yet greater foe to God. With his own hands, he hewed down the cross by the forest; he cast the holy images out of his cabin, and would even have removed the statue of Our Lady of Chenstohova, because it was in his way when he ploughed. Hardly could his wife, with many prayers and



tears and entreaties, prevail upon him to let it remain.

"The years flew by, like a rapid river. His wealth increased enormously, and his importance along with it; so that the King himself came to see the man, invited him to Court, and gave him the post of chamberlain there.

"Now was he puffed up, and looked down upon all, oppressed the poor, threw honesty to the winds, and cared no whit for anyone in the world.

"He also most foolishly closed his mind against the thought that he must one day pay dearly for all this.

"But at last the hour of reckoning arrived.

"Our Lord's patience and mercy towards that hardened sinner came to an end at last.

"And his doom and punishment swooped down upon him.

"First, he was assailed by sore diseases, which tortured him unceasingly.

"Then the plague swept away all his castle.

"Next, his farm-buildings were struck by lightning and burned to the ground.

"After which, his corn crops were ruined by hail-storms.

"Then such terrible droughts came that everything was withered up and, being dry, burned to ashes; the very ground was cracked and fissured, and his trees died for lack of water.

"All men abandoned him, and Want sat down at his threshold.

"He was exceeding sick, and his flesh fell from off his bones, which began to rot.

"He called for Michalek and his fellow-demons to help him; but without avail. When the hand of the Lord is lifted up in anger against any man, Satan can do nothing.

"Instead of trying to aid him, the fiends, who were sure that he was already theirs, blew fire into his horrible wounds to make them rankle yet more.

"And now, nothing could save him but God's mercy.

"Late in the autumn, there came so windy a night that the gale tore off the roof of the cabin, and all the doors and

windows; and with it there entered a troop of fiends that fell to dancing as they pressed forwards with pitchforks to the middle of the room, where the Hawk lay dying.

"His wife did what she could to protect him. Thrusting a holy image in front of him, and chalking the sign of the cross on the door and windows, she drove them out; but she was most anxious lest he should die unreconciled to God, and without the last sacraments. So, although he had forbidden her, being hardened even at this last hour, and though Satan sought to turn her back, she found an opportunity, and slipped away to where the parish priest lived.

"But he was just driving out, and did not care to attend so wicked a man.

"'God has abandoned him: he needs must belong to Satan: I have nothing to do there.' And off he drove to play cards with the manor-folk.

"Weeping in bitter woe, the woman knelt down before the statue of Our Lady of Chenstohova, and sobbed and besought mercy for him from the bottom of her heart.

"And the Holy Virgin took pity, and spake to her:

"'Woman,' she said, 'weep not: thy prayer is granted.'

"And down she came from the altar, just as she was: crowned with gold, clad in her azure star-besprinkled mantle, and with a rosary dangling at her side . . . she, the Holy Mother, like unto the morning star, all beaming with loving-kindness! The woman fell upon her face before her.

"With her sacred hands she raised her up compassionately, wiped away her tears, and said tenderly:

"'Take me to thy cabin, faithful servant; it may be that I can do something.'

"She looked on the dying sinner, and her merciful heart yearned within her at the sight.

"'Thy husband must not die without a priest: the power to shrive, that priests have received from God, is not mine; for I am but a woman. That priest is an evil-doer, and



cares not for his flock. For that will he answer to God; but he alone can give absolution. . . . I will go myself to the manor and fetch this gambler thence.—Here is my rosary: keep the fiends at bay with it till I come back.’

“But how was she to go? The night was dark, windy, rainy, miry. It was far to go, besides; and moreover, the fiends set up obstacles everywhere to prevent her.

“Our Heavenly Lady dreaded none of these things. She only muffled herself in a sheet of coarse drugget against the foul weather, and went out into the darkness.

“Exhausted and quite drenched, she arrived at the manor, knocked at the door, and humbly begged the priest to come to a sick man; but, supposing her to be some poor woman, and knowing how stormy it was out of doors, he sent her word that he would come next day, being too busy just then. So he went on playing, drinking, and enjoying himself with the gentlemen there.

“Our Lord’s Mother sighed deeply at his evil behaviour; but, causing a gilded coach and horses and servants to appear at once, she went into the room, arrayed in the garb of a castellan’s lady.

“Of course the priest set out with her at once and very eagerly.

“They arrived, but only just in time; the man was almost at his last gasp, and the fiends were making efforts to rush in and carry him alive to hell, before the priest arrived with the Sacred Host.

“The Hawk confessed, repented, was shriven, and gave up the ghost. Our Lady herself closed his eyes; then, when she had blessed his widow, she turned to the bewildered priest and said:

“‘Follow thou me!’

“He did so, ever more and more amazed; but, looking out of the cabin-door, saw neither coach nor servants—only rain, mire, darkness—and Death dogging each of his steps! Mightily afraid, he followed our Lady to the chapel.

“Then he beheld her, now in her mantle and crown, sur-

rounded with a choir of angels, as she again took her place upon the altar.

"Then he knew her for the queen of Heaven, and was terrified. Falling on his knees, he wept aloud, and begged her to have mercy.

"But the Blessed Virgin eyed him with indignation, and said:

"Many a century shalt thou kneel here in penance for thy sins, ere thou hast atoned for them!"

"And immediately he turned into stone, and remained in that posture, weeping every night, holding out his hands to her, and awaiting the hour of pardon. Thus has he been kneeling for ages and ages.

"Amen! . . .

"Even at the present day, that same priest is to be seen in Dombrova. The stone figure stands outside the church, in perpetual memory of the fact, and as a warning to all sinners."

All listened with attention; all were subdued, filled with wonder, awed and silenced.

For what could they say at such a moment—when the soul, expanding like the iron which glows red-hot in the fire, is so flooded with emotion and splendour that one has but to strike upon it, and it shoots forth a starry shower, becoming, as it were, a rainbow suspended between earth and heaven?

And so they remained, hushed and silent, until the glow that then filled them had dwindled and faded away.

Matthew took out his flute, and the touch of his cunning fingers brought forth the anthem, "To Thy Protection, Holy Mother of God . . ." with its touching, measureless, opalescent melody, like gossamer-besprinkled dew-drops; and they all, in low voices, took up the anthem after him.

And then, little by little, one by one, they went back to their everyday mood and talk.

After a time the young people smiled and laughed; for Teresa, the soldier's wife, was asking them funny riddles.



In a while, someone coming in said that Boryna was back from the law-court, and drinking in the tavern with his companions: at which Yagna quickly and quietly slipped out. Antek slipped out too, catching up with her at the outer entrance on the very threshold; he seized her hand fast, and led her on to the outer yard, and through the orchard, beyond the barns and granaries.

## CHAPTER XI

PAST the orchard, gliding swiftly, stooping forward as they went under the snow-laden boughs, they ran like frightened deer along by the barns and into the murky snow-plain, into the starless night, into the unfathomable stillness of the frozen waste.

So, speeding on, swallowed up by the shadows, they presently forgot all the rest of the world. Each, with arm round the other's waist, seized in a tight grasp, ran along with rapid steps, bending down, hip to hip—rejoicing, yet with fear, silent, yet with hearts full of song—athwart the bluish livid obscurity which enveloped them.

"Yagna?"

"Dearest?"

"Are you really here?"

"Can you doubt it?"

They said no more, and were at times forced to stop and take breath.

Unable to speak for the throbbing of their hearts, and forced besides to suppress their feelings, which else would have burst out in a wild cry, they only glanced at one another; their eyes darted still but ardent lightnings, and lips flew to lips in an impetuous rush, and with such hungry ravenous craving that they both reeled in ecstasy, panted for breath, feeling the earth crumble beneath their feet, as it were, while they fell into a fiery abyss—and, looking at one another with eyes blinded by those flames, saw nothing more!—And again they would dash forward—whither, they could not tell: only longing to be farther, farther away—plunged in the murkiest possible shadows, in the thickest intricacy of gloom.

One more field passed—and yet another! Farther and



deeper still—till nothing more was seen—till they could forget the whole world, and their own existence, and enter the realm of Fairyland, lost as in some strange dream, like to the marvellous waking vision which they had had but now, in Klemba's hut!—And, indeed, they still felt the influence, luminous in its vagueness, of those mystic legends they had heard breathed low; they still were attuned to the diapason of wonders and of miracles; and those same fantastic myths were pouring a shower of unearthly blossoms into their souls: entrancement, awe, intense stupefaction, intoxicating bliss, unappeasable desire!

Yes, they were yet wrapped in that rainbow-coloured mantle of marvellous ideal happenings; still, so to speak, they followed in the wake of the wonderful pageant they had seen go by; they traversed strange fabulous lands, and went through all those superhuman scenes and actions, all those wonders, those enchantments, those magical spells. They beheld visions, swaying in the dark, floating along the sky, expanding as they looked, and touching their hearts with such telling power that they could not breathe for dread, but stood pressed close one to the other, mute, terror-struck, and gazing into the opaque bottomless depths of their dreams. And their minds would then blossom forth into the blossoms of fantasy—the beautiful flowers of faith and loving rapture . . . and they sounded the extremes of admiration and oblivious joy.

Then, returning to earth once more, they would search the night with bewildered eyes, scarce knowing in which world they were, whether those marvels had been realized, or were all mere phantoms and creations of the brain.

"Say, Yagna, are you not afraid?"

"I? I would go with you to the very end of the world—die with you!" she whispered with energy, pressing very close to him.

"Were you waiting there for me?" he asked after a while.

"Dearest, at every opening of the door, I expected you! I went there only for you; and how I feared you would fail to come!"

"Yet, when I came, ye feigned not to see me!"

"Nonsense. Should I look, with folks' eyes upon me?—Ah, there was that within me which yearned so, I wonder I did not fall off my seat in a swoon."

"Sweetest!"

"You sat behind me, and I knew it; but I feared to look round—feared to speak: all the time my heart went pit-a-pat, and beat so loud, I think folk must have heard."

"I thought to find you at the Klembas', and to leave with you."

"I meant to run straight home . . . but ye constrained me . . ."

"Against your will? Say, Yagna!"

"Nay . . . more than once . . . I thought that this might come to pass!"

"Did you think so? Did you think so?" he whispered, in a passion of love.

"Surely, Antek.—And besides . . . there . . . continually . . . beyond the stile . . . it was not well with us."

"True.—Here, none will disturb us. We are alone."

"Aye, alone! And how thick this darkness is!" she murmured, throwing her arms about his neck, and embracing him with all the vehemence of her passionate soul.

Now there was no longer any wind; only a slight breeze which from time to time caressed and cooled their burning faces. Neither stars nor moon were visible: the sky was louring, covered with thick clouds as with a ragged fleece, and dark-brown as a herd of oxen upon a bare waste field. Things loomed dimly afar, as if seen through expanses of drab smoke, as if the whole world were but a tissue of fogs, of darkness rolling around on every side, of seething murk.

A movement in the air—an uneasy vibration, scarce to be felt, seemed floating forth from the forests, lost in the night.

It was very dark: in the atmosphere, thrilled with a dreary and ominous agitation, they were aware of a dull eerie motion, of strange indefinite vibrations, of vague fearful mutterings and lurking shapes that had no shape! Sometimes,



on a sudden, feebly gleaming from out the voluminous dusk, there appeared the spectral pallor of the snow-fields; and a few glimmers—chilly, moist, viscous glimmers—would coil and uncoil in snaky folds across the shadows; and again the night would shut her eyelids fast, and the darkness descended with a black impenetrable downpour, in which all things were lost. The eye, no longer able to perceive anything, now sounded the uttermost abyss of this portentous invisibility, whose dull sepulchral deadness benumbed and overwhelmed the mind.—But at times the veil of obscurity was rent in twain, as by some mighty force, and through that tremendous rift one could see the black-hue expanse of heaven, serene and studded with stars.

And now—was it from fields or from huts? from the sky above, or from the gloom-drowned horizons?—who can say? . . . but there came . . . trembling . . . muttering . . . slinking . . . what? voices, gleams, scarce audible echoes—call them what you will: the ghosts of things and sounds long ago dead and gone, now haunting the world again, seemed moving to and fro in a ghastly procession, expiring far away, as the light of a star may expire in the abyss.

But these two paid little heed to all this. Within them there raged a tempest; every minute it grew and grew, rolling from heart to heart in a hurricane of hot unspoken desires, of flashing glances, of shuddering pangs, of scorching kisses, of words as stammering and incoherent and inarticulate as is the thunder in the sky: of instants as mute as death, of fondness so excruciating that they choked each other with caresses, and their hugs gave them intense pain, while they struggled to hurt and to be hurt for the delight of that pain; and their eyes filmed over, and they could no longer see anything at all!

Swept onward by the wild blast of their passion, blinded to everything, maddened even to frenzy, forgetful of all, and burning with the same mutual flame, they had, in that night of palpable darkness, fled out into the loneliness of

the silent waste, about to give themselves to each other entirely, "till death did them part," and from the very bottom of their souls that were starving with the insatiable hunger of unfulfilled desire.

They were by this time unable to speak, save for a few instinctive cries that welled out of their inmost being—a few strangled whispers, thrown forth as spasmodically, as fitfully, as the flames of a fire—rambling, raving, insane words—with hungry devouring looks, looks of frenzy mixed with haggard terror, looks that betrayed the storm that raged within.—Till at last there swept over him and her a convulsion so irresistible, such an uncontrollable spasm of craving, that, losing their senses completely, they closed with a mad frantic cry . . . and fell!

And, with them, their whole world reeled and crashed headlong into the abyss!

"Oh, I am beside myself!"

"Be silent, dear, be silent!"

"I cannot; else I should go mad!"

"My heart is bursting asunder!"

"And my blood burns my veins!"

"Death—is it death coming—or a swoon?"

"My own, my own!"

"O Antek!"

Even as those elements which combine to form life wake up in the early months of every year, and—impelled by eternal affinity—set out to seek one another throughout the world, from end to end of earth and sky, until they meet in springtime, and unite, and bring forth to our astonished eyes now flowers, now babes, now huge green trees that murmur in the wind:

So they too, after long days of desire and torment, days of greyness and of void, met, found each other, mingled with an uncontrollable cry, rushing into one another's arms, and clinging close: Just so may two pine-trees, uprooted by the storm and tossed together in a desperate embrace, strive



with might and main, wrestling in a mortal grip, whirling, reeling, rebounding—till they both drop to the ground and die!

And over these two did the night weave her veil of shadows, that the things which were to be might come to pass.

Somewhere among those shadows, partridges were heard to pipe, so near at hand that the passage of the whole covey was distinctly audible. A quick rustling sounded—wings flapping the snow for an upward flight. Other noises, keen and shrill, broke the stillness now and then; and from the village that therefore could hardly be very far away, there came the loud though muffled crowing of cocks.

"It must be late," she whispered timidly.

"Oh, it is yet long before midnight: 'tis only change of weather makes them crow."

"A thaw is setting in."

"Aye, the snow is softer now."

Some hares, not far from the rock under which they were sitting, then fell to squeaking, playing about and gambolling merrily; and presently a whole band of them darted by, so near them that they shrank in alarm.

"'Tis pairing-time; the little beasts are so excited that they fear nothing. . . . Spring will soon be here."

"I thought some large creature was rushing at us!"

"Hush!" he hissed in sudden terror. "Crouch low!"

They silently crept close to the rock. Out of the dusk, less black because of the reflecting snow, appeared long shadows, stalking some prey, advancing slowly, slowly, pressed close to the ground, and sometimes completely vanishing—swallowed up, as it were, by the earth; their eyes alone shining greenly phosphorescent, like glow-worms in a copse. The creatures were about forty yards away, but soon farther, disappearing into the darkness. . . . And then, all at once, came the throttled scream of a hare in mortal jeopardy . . . a scraping and a scuffling of feet . . . a rattle and a snarl, the sound of crunched bones, a fierce growling;

and then once more silence, deep and dreadful, prevailed all around.

"Wolves.—Tearing a hare piecemeal."

"If they had scented us!"

"They could not: the wind blows towards us."

"I am afraid. Let us go. I feel cold as ice," she said with a shudder.

He took her in his arms. She warmed to his kisses, and oblivion of all things came over them once more. With one arm tight round the other's waist, they both went along their straggling way, swinging and bending to and fro, as trees do, when, too heavily laden with blossoms, they wave restfully to the gentle hum of bees.

They spoke rarely; but their kisses and sighs and passionate ejaculations, their low blissful murmurs and rapturous heart-beats, vibrated above them and around, as the warm air trembles and quivers over a field in springtime. For now they were like those vast plains all in flower, plunged in the radiance and harmony of joy; thus did they glow, with eyes like opening buds; thus did their souls echo back the hot perfumes of meadows basking in the sunbeams, the shimmering of brooks, the low faint twittering of birds. Their beating hearts were in unison with those spring-tide regions; and the words they uttered—few, full of meaning, and scarce audible—welled forth from their innermost souls, as young shoots burst from the parent tree at the dawn of a May morning; their breaths were like the zephyrs that fondle the sprouting corn, and their souls like a day in the spring season—sunny as the rising blades of wheat, and not less full of the songs of larks, of brightness, of whispering, of dazzling virescence, and the irresistible gladness of life!

Then again they grew silent and stopped short, seized with awe of something they knew not what, which was about to be: as when a cloud floats over the sun, and the world at once waxes still and sad, and darkens with uneasy misgiving.

But they soon shook off this mood, and joy again burst out in their bosoms with a great conflagration; glee once



more swept the chords of their hearts, and now they were flying up with bliss, compelled to soar.—And, all unwittingly, they burst out into passionate and delirious song.

They swayed to the rhythm of their voices, which rose as on many-coloured pinions, and sped through the dead stillness of the night in a star-seeking, fiery rush.

And now, completely beside themselves, they strode along, each leaning on the other, driven on by a blind impulse, lost in their mutual love, oblivious of all things, entranced by the spell of a superhuman emotion, which lifted them up to the topmost heights of entrancement, and forced its way out in that timeless, formless, almost wordless chant of theirs!

A wild and a stormy chant it was, rushing torrentially out of their burning hearts, and pouring forth into the world with its all-conquering strain of love!

How it flamed in the sombre chaos of the night! How it lit up the wilds like a bush burning in the desert!

Now it was like the dull and ponderous growl of the waters, when they arise in their strength, and shatter their icy bonds.

Now it was scarce to be heard—a sweet melodious whisper, sounding and rustling faintly, like corn that waves in the sunshine!

And, after a while, it resembled the lay of frightened birds that rise to the sun on frenzied fluttering wings, and at last (their bosoms expanded with soaring up towards those infinite heights) utter forth the triumphant hymn of the earth, the immortal cry of life and existence!

"Yagna!" Antek whispered, as if surprised to know she was by his side.

"Here I am."—But her reply seemed subdued and sorrowful.

They were now upon the pathway that skirted the village, at some distance outside of the encircling granaries, but on the side next to Boryna's farm.

All at once, Yagna burst out crying.

"Why, what is amiss?"

"I cannot tell: something has come over me, and forced the tears to start."

Greatly distressed, he made her sit down with him close to a granary with outstanding beams; there he gathered her tenderly in his arms, rocking her on his breast like a child. Her tears continued to flow, as dew distilling from flowers; he wiped them away, but they still flowed on.

"Are you afraid of anything?"

"Of what, pray? Only within me there waxes a stillness as though Death stood here beside me; yet all the while something lifts me up, so that I would fain climb the sky, and sail away among the clouds."

He replied nothing. The light had all at once gone out of their souls; a shadow passing over them troubled their calm and bore in upon them a strange sense of longing, which made them cling yet closer one to the other, and seek yet more earnestly to find mutual support, each vying with the other in the desire to flee away into some unknown world.

The wind rose; the trees rocked in ghastly wise, covering them both with moist snow; the close-pressed louring clouds began to fall swiftly asunder and roll away, while a low tremulous moan floated across the fields.

"'Tis late, 'tis late; we must run home," she whispered, half rising.

"Do not fear: people are not yet asleep: I can hear them on the road.—Coming back from Klemba's, belike."

"But I left the food-tubs in the byre; the kine may break their legs on them."

The voices they heard grew louder and then fainter again and more remote, while they stood silent. But on one side of them—on the very same pathway, it seemed—the snow crunched crisply, and a tall shadow came out of the gloom, showing so plain that they both started to their feet.

"Someone is there, skulking behind that hedge!"

"That's mere fancy: night-clouds often throw such moving shadows."

They peered long into the darkness, listening intently.



"Come," he then whispered to her, "let us go to the haystack: we shall be more at ease there."

Looking round anxiously every now and then, they held their breath as they stopped to listen; but all was as still as death. So on they went, stooping forward cautiously, till they got to the haystack, and disappeared in the deep opening that yawned just above the ground.

All was pitch-dark again; the clouds had come together, forming an impenetrable mass: the pale starlight was quenched, and the night, closing its eyes, had fallen into a deep sleep. The stillness grew yet more intense, more awful, broken only by the waving of the snow-burdened trees, and the water babbling under the mill-wheels far, far away.

But after a long interval, the snow upon the road crackled once more beneath steps—still, stealthy steps like the tread of a wolf. A shadow passed along, close to the walls, and, crouching down, made its way through the snow, ever nearer and nearer. . . . It grew larger . . . stopped many a time, to go forward again . . . passed round the hayrick on the outer side and, creeping up to the opening, listened long and closely.

Then it went away to the stile, and vanished among the trees.

About a minute afterwards, it appeared again, bearing a truss of straw. It stopped, listened awhile, and then, springing forward to the haystack, thrust the truss of straw into the hole, rammed it in tight . . . and struck a match. Instantly the straw was in flames and shot out many a blazing tongue, which presently burst into a sheet of red fire, spreading all over one side of the rick.

And Boryna, pitchfork in hand, head lowered, stood there watching, white as a sheet!

They at once realized their position; a ruddy glow already lit the darkness of the den where they lay, and a pungent smoke filled the air. They beat wildly about on one side and another, finding no issue, maddened with horror, and scarcely able to breath. But, by marvellous good luck,

Antek happened upon the tarpaulin cover and, pushing with all his might, tore it down, falling to the ground along with it. Ere he could rise, Boryna was upon him with pitchfork raised to pin him to the earth. He missed: Antek leaped up and, before the old man could aim a second thrust, felled him with a blow of his fist in the chest—and fled.

Boryna, up in an instant, rushed to the haystack; but Yagna too was no longer there, having slipped out and disappeared in the night. And then, in the voice of one raving mad with rage, he roared out: "Fire! Fire!" and ran round the hayrick, wielding his pitchfork, and looking for all the world like a fiend in the blood-red glow. . . . —The fire had by now got complete hold of the stack—hissing, humming, roaring, and raising on high its pillar of flame and of smoke.

Folk came along in haste; the cry of "Fire!" had quickly spread through the village. Someone had rung the alarm-bell, and every heart was throbbing with fear. But the flame of the conflagration rose ever higher and higher, waving its fiery mantle from side to side, and raining a torrent of red sparks over all the buildings, both near it and throughout the whole village.



## CHAPTER XII

THE morrow which followed that memorable night was full of great excitement; and all Lipka swarmed like an ant-hill when a naughty boy has thrust a stick into it.

Dawn had scarcely risen, people had but just begun to rub their eyes and wake up, when they all of one accord made their way to the scene of the fire. Some even said their prayers as they went, to save time, and hurried along as to a fair.

The day rose, blurred as with mist; for the snow, coming down in great soft flakes, threw its wet ragged cloak over everything. That, however, no one minded; all gathered in groups, and stood for hours together on the spot, talking in low tones about the events of the night, and pricking up their ears to get at any new detail that might offer.

The rick was in ruins—so completely burned down that nothing had been left standing save the two supports it had been built upon. And these too were like half-burnt-out brands. The thatch had also been torn from the sties and the shed, down to the very girders. The pathway and neighbouring land were, for half the length of a field, covered with burnt thatch, splinters of laths, ashes of straw, bits of charred wood.

The snow continued to fall, and after a time overspread everything with a glistening sheet, which the glowing embers had thawed in places. Here and there, too, there issued streams of smoke or even pale hissing flames from heaps of hay that had been pulled from the rick, which the men set to work upon with hedge-bills, stamping out the flames with their clogs, beating the hay with sticks, and heaping it over with snow.

They were just at work on one of those smouldering heaps, when a lad fished out a charred rag and held it aloft.

"'Tis Yagna's apron!" Kozlova sneered; for they all knew what had taken place, or guessed it shrewdly.

"Search well, lads; ye may also find a pair of hose."

"Oh, no! he carried them off unscathed . . . unless he lost them by the way!"

"The lasses have been after them all the time, but some-one was too quick and got them first."

"Silence, babblers!" the Soltys shouted indignantly. "Come ye to make merry here, and grin over your neighbour's misfortune?—Off, women! get you home; what do ye, standing here?"

"Meddle not with our business, but do your own; for that only are ye in office!" Kozlova retorted in such shrill tones of anger that the Soltys looked her in the face, spat with disgust, and withdrew to the farm-yard. No one moved an inch; and the women set to pushing the singed apron about with their clogs, and confer together in fierce tones.

"Such a one," Kozlova said aloud, "should be treated as witches were dealt with of old—driven out from amongst us with a lighted candle and an oven-poker!"

"Surely! Has not all this befallen through her fault?" chimed in Sikora's wife.

"It is," put in Sohova gently, "a mercy of the Lord that the whole village has not been burnt down!"

"True: a miracle, a miracle indeed."

"Yes; there was no wind, and they gave the alarm at once."

"Besides, the alarm-bell was rung, and we were only in our first sleep."

"It is likely the bear-leaders, who were coming from the tavern, were the first to see it."

"Ah, no, my dear! Boryna caught them inside the haystack, and had only just separated them, when the fire broke out. Last night, when I saw them at the Klembas', going out together, I was sure something of the sort would happen."

"The old man had long been on the watch to catch them."



"My son tells me he had been walking about outside Klemba's ever so long, waiting for them," Kobusova remarked.

"Antek must have set the rick on fire out of spite."

"Did he not threaten he would do so?"

"It could not but have ended in some such way; it could not," Kozlova put in.

Meanwhile, another group of housewives were also whispering, but lower and to more purpose.

"Do you know? Boryna has swinged Yagna so, that she is now lying sick in her mother's house!"

"Certainly; he turned her out at dawn, and sent her chest with all her things after her," Balcerek's wife, who had hitherto said nothing, told them now.

Ploshka's wife contradicted her:

"Pray do not talk at random; I was in the hut just now, and her chest is standing there.

"But," she added in a higher key, "on her wedding-day I foretold it would come to this."

"O my God!" Sohova groaned, raising her open hands, "what an awful, awful thing!"

"Ah, well, he will be locked up for it, and that's all!"

"It is but just: we might all have been burnt out."

"I," said Ploshka's wife, "was beginning to enjoy my first sleep, when Luke, who had been running about with the bear-leaders, came tapping at my window-pane and crying: 'Fire!'—Jesu Maria! the window was as red as hot embers. . . . And I felt so faint, I could not budge one inch. . . . And the bell tolled, and the people shrieked . . ."

Here someone broke in: "No sooner had I heard there was a fire at Boryna's than I knew it was Antek's doing."

"Tush, ye talk as though ye had seen him do it."

"Seen him I have not; but all say it is he."

"Why, Yagustynka has been whispering something of the sort for ever so long."

"Of course they will put him in the stocks, and then in prison."

"But," cried Balcerkova, whose pride was that she knew the law, "what can they do to him? Who has seen the man? What witnesses are there?"

"Well, but did not Boryna catch him in the act?"

"Yes; but not in *that* act.—Besides, even had it been that, his testimony is worthless, because he is at odds with his son!"

"After all, 'tis the court's business, not ours; but who, before God and man, is guilty of it all, if not that foul wench Yagna?" Balcerkova continued sternly, raising her voice.

"You say true!—Ah, such wickedness, such depravity!" they assented, speaking lower and thronging closer, as they recounted her former misdeeds.

Little by little, their voices rose loud in condemnation of Yagna's behaviour. All the old offences which had caused their hatred, now again returned to their minds: a shower of epithets, reproaches, threats, and evil spiteful words, were hurled at her; and their fury was so hot that, had she appeared among them at that instant, she would surely have been attacked and beaten.

The men, on the other side, were discussing Antek, more calmly, but not with less animosity. Every heart was full of indignation and bitterness. More than one fist was shaken with dangerous menace, more than one word of harsh import flew about. Even Matthew, who had been on his side at first, forsook him now, only saying:

"Well, if the man had dared to attempt such a thing, he must needs be out of his mind."

Thereupon the blacksmith entered the lists, speaking loud, with furious passion, and pointing out to them that Antek had long ago threatened his father he would burn him down; that Boryna had known of his threats, and been in the habit of keeping watch every night.

"Yes, I could take my oath it was he that did it.—Besides, there are witnesses who will speak; he must—he must be punished! Was he not always plotting with the farm-



hands, setting them against their betters, egging them on to evil deeds?—Yes, and I know,” he cried in threatening tones, “I know more than one of these—I see them here before me, and they hear me speak . . . and yet they dare to stand up for such a scoundrel—one who taints the whole place! . . . To prison, to Siberia with the wretch! What—with his own stepmother! Was not that crime heinous enough, without adding to it arson besides? ’Tis a wonder any of us is yet alive!” . . . And so he went on, shrieking and shouting so vehemently that he might be guessed to have a purpose in doing so.

Roch, who stood with Klemba not far off, took good note of this, and said:

“Ye make a mighty uproar against him, yet ye were drinking with him in the tavern only yesterday!”

“Whoso would beggar all the village is my foe!”

“And yet,” Klemba gravely remarked, “the Squire is no foe of yours!”

The smith then strode off amongst the people, stirring them up, calling them to take revenge, and laying unheard-of offences to Antek’s account; and his hearers, already greatly moved, were presently wrought to the very highest pitch of rage. Some began to cry that the incendiary ought to be seized, fettered, and taken to the police-court; while others, of yet more fiery mettle (those especially whose ribs had in days past felt Antek’s cudgel), were now looking for sticks, intending to drag him from his cabin and give him such a thrashing as he would remember to his dying day.

The clamour grew, with cries, threats, curses, and a hulloaloo so great that the folk swayed hither and thither like a spinney in a gale, rolling to and from the palings of the enclosure, and preparing to pour out through the gate into the road. The Voyt came to pacify them, but without avail; nor did the Soltys and the elders of the village succeed any better. Their voices were lost in the uproar, and they were themselves swept away by the torrent. No one heeded what they said: everyone dashed on, tore along, and shouted

with all the force of his lungs: the whole band, carried forward by a tempest of hate, appeared like men possessed.

At that moment, Kozlova elbowed her way forward, vociferating:

"There are two culprits: let both be dragged to the place of their crime and judged there!"

The married women, especially the poorest of all, took up the cry with a hideous bellow and, with arms stretched forth, placed themselves by her side. The mob rolled on with the din of a raging torrent.

The howling and shrieking grew as they went on, delayed by the narrow fenced road; they all pressed together, surging along, shrieking, shaking their fists, and lurched against one another, glaring with sinister glances; and a savage many-sounding voice, the cry of universal exasperation, burst from them as they hastened on, intent upon their purpose.—Suddenly those in front cried out:

"The priest! the priest!—And with the Sacred Host!"

At this the mob moved uneasily, as if held back by a chain—wavered, spread out upon the road, stopped, and broke up into little groups. A hush fell all at once upon them: they were struck speechless—fell on their knees and, kneeling, bowed down their heads.

It was indeed the priest, coming out of the church, and bearing with him Christ's Body—the holy viaticum. Ambrose walked on in front, ringing a bell and swinging a lantern.

He went swiftly past, and presently, in the eddying snow-fall, was seen only as a dim blur outside a frozen window-pane. Then they rose from their knees.

"Going over to Filipka. She was so starved with cold in the forest yesterday that she has been scarce able to breathe since dawn. They say she will not hold out till night."

"He has also been called to Bartek of the saw-mill."

"What's amiss with him?"

"Why, know ye not? A falling tree-trunk has crushed



the man so, that he is not likely ever to be well again." So they whispered—still gazing after the priest, now almost unseen.

Several of the elder dames had joined him to follow in procession, together with a large party of men; and the rest stood uncertain, like a flock of sheep which their dog has headed round. All their resentment had evaporated, the back of the riot was broken, the din ceased. They looked at one another, scratched their heads or mumbled some unconnected words; several were ashamed of themselves, spat on the ground, and slunk off. Part of the crowd thus leaked away like water, creeping through fences and into wayside cabins. Kozlova alone went on ranting in spite of all, and threatening Antek and Yagna; but, seeing himself without adherents, she had a passage of arms with Roch (who had told her certain truths), and then went back to the village. In the end but few remained, watching at the place of the disaster, lest the fire should break out anew.

The blacksmith, too, remained in the farm-yard, much vexed with the course of events. He spoke no more to anyone, but prowled about, prying into holes and corners, and more than once driving Lapa away for persistently following him and barking.

All this time, Boryna was nowhere to be seen. He was, they said, fast asleep under his bed-clothes; and only Yuzka, with eyes red from crying, peeped out of doors for a moment to disappear immediately. Yagustynka did the farm-yard work alone, as waspish that morning as could possibly be. It was no use speaking to her, and after a few answers that stung like nettles, no one cared to try.

Punctually at noon, a clerk and several gendarmes arrived in Lipka. They wrote a great deal, and made much inquiry into the causes of the fire: which made all present take themselves off pretty quickly, fearing to be called as witnesses.

No one was even seen about the roads; but this was because the snow, falling ceaselessly and yet moister than before, was melting ere it touched the earth, and covered the

whole country with a layer of half-liquid slush. But the folk at home were as lively as bees in a hive; that day had brought them an unexpected respite from their work; few did anything at all, and at some farms the cows were lowing over their empty mangers. In every cabin, people were busily discussing the great event, and often someone would pass from hut to hut: old dames especially, wagging eager tongues. So, from hearth to hearth, news went fluttering round like crows; and at windows and front doors, and elsewhere within the enclosures, many an inquisitive face was seen, watching for Antek to appear, going by in the clutch of the law!

Their curiosity increased hourly, still unsatisfied. Every now and then, someone would rush in, with the breathless announcement that the gendarmes were at Antek's; or swore that he had overpowered them, broken his fetters, and got away. And others had other facts at hand, not less sure than these.

One thing was beyond doubt. Vitek had run to the tavern to get vodka, and great volumes of smoke were pouring out of Boryna's chimney: which told of good cheer preparing within.

Then evening came, clerk and gendarmes drove off in the Voyt's britzka.—But Antek was not along with them!

Great was the wonder and disappointment of the village folk. All had expected to see him carried off in chains. It was in vain that they put their heads together to guess what the old man's testimony had been. That only the Voyt and the Soltys knew: and they kept their own counsel. So the village was in a fever of curiosity; and manifold conjectures, some of them quite incredible, were put forth.

The night fell slowly, dark and quiet enough; the snow no longer fell, and there were signs of a slight frost at hand; for a star or two glittered in the sky, and a bleak wind was hardening the wet expanses of snow which began to break underfoot into thin crackling splinters. Lights shone from within the cabins, where the folk, closely crowded, rested



from the emotions of the day and gave rein to yet more conjectures and surmises.

The field was a wide one. Antek had not been arrested: so he was innocent of having burnt the rick. Then who was guilty? Not Yagna, certainly: no one dreamed she was. And as little did anyone think of accusing old Boryna.

So they groped and groped in the dark, quite unable to find any solution of the mystery. There was no hut wherein the question was not debated, nor any where they arrived at the truth. The only outcome of all these debates was that people were no longer set against Antek. Even his enemies' mouths were stopped; and his friends, Matthew amongst them, once more lifted up their voices in his favour. On the other hand, their fierce hatred for Yagna became still more envenomed. With cruel tongues, the women set themselves to deal with her, dragging her as through a wilderness of thorns and briars. Dominikova, too, came in for her share, and no small one either: being all the more spitefully treated, because no one could say what had become of Yagna; her mother had driven all busy-bodies from her door, as one drives away troublesome dogs.

But all unanimously felt profound compassion and sympathy for Hanka, whom they pitied sincerely, and heartily condoled with. Klemba's wife and Sikora had even gone to her that same evening, bearing with them presents in bundles for the poor woman.

Thus that memorable day went by. The next, things were once more as usual. Curiosity and resentment had cooled down, indignation was blunted and subdued: the daily round of work began again, and they bent their necks to the yoke, and accepted the lot which the Lord God had given them.

At times, indeed, people would talk of what had taken place, but more and more seldom now, and ever with less keen interest.

March coming round, the weather grew really intolerable: dark, muggy, dreary, with such deluges of rain and sleet that to stay within doors was almost a necessity. The sun seemed to have lost itself somewhere among those low-lying

masses of cloud, and often did not shine for one second throughout the livelong day. The snows melted, or softened only, taking a dingy greenish hue, like mouldy walls; the furrows were filled with water, and it flooded the lower lands, and the outlying premises of the farms; and during the nights a frost would frequently come and make walking along the slippery roads and paths no easy matter.

And this abominable weather made folks think less and less about the late fire; the more so, because neither Boryna nor Antek nor Yagna excited curiosity by appearing in public. Thus did the event fall into oblivion, as a stone falls into a stream; the water swirls and eddies over it, ripples, breaks, trembles . . . and flows clamly on as before.

And so things went on until Shrove-Tuesday, the last day before Lent.

It was somewhat of a holiday, and since the dawn a good deal of bustling had been going on about the cabins. From well-nigh every home someone had gone to town to get various articles, especially meat—or at least a bit of sausage or fat bacon. Only the very poorest had to be satisfied with a herring (bought on credit from the Jew) with a dish of boiled potatoes and salt.

But, ever since noontide, the wealthier housewives had been frying doughnuts; and the odours of burnt dripping, and baked meats, and other viands yet more alluring, filled the air of the whole place.

Once more did the bear-leaders make their appearance, straying from hut to hut and performing; and the shouts of the lads who accompanied them echoed now from one part of the village, now from another.

And in the evening, when supper was over, the band played in the tavern; everyone that could move his legs hastened thither, caring not one whit for the sleet that had begun pouring down with the twilight.

They enjoyed themselves with particular gusto, because it was the last time dancing was allowed before Eastertide. Matthew played the flute, and Pete (Boryna's man) ac-



accompanied him on the fiddle, while Yasyek Topsy-turvy performed on the drum.

And all danced with extraordinary life and spirit, until such time as the tolling of the church-bell signified to them that midnight had come—and that the Carnival was over.

At once the band ceased playing, the dances stopped; everyone promptly dispatched what food remained, and all went home—except old Ambrose, who, fairly drunk, stayed singing outside the tavern, according to his wont.

No lights shone anywhere but in Dominikova's cabin; but there, it was said, the Voyt and the Soltys sat in conference till the second cock-crow, to reconcile Yagna and Boryna.

And when the whole village was fast asleep, and the land at rest (the rain having stopped about midnight), they were still deep in conference.

But in Antek's hut there was no joyous Carnival, no quiet sleep, nor any peace at all.

God alone knows, and no human tongue can tell, what passed in Hanka's mind during those long days and nights since she had met her husband outside the hut, when he forced her to go in.

For that same night she had been told, all by Veronka.

The agony of it slew her soul within her, and it lay like a naked corpse, horrible in death. For the first day or two, she hardly stirred from her distaff and spinning-gear: though she spun nothing, only moving her hands mechanically, as one in a deathly slumber, gazing within herself, looking on the storm of sufferings that were hers, and on the miserable chaos of burning tears, wrongs borne, injustice suffered. All that time she neither ate nor slept; even her children's cries could not recall her to herself. Veronka had pity on her, and took care of the little ones, and of her old father, too, who—to make matters worse—had fallen ill after that expedition to the forest, and lay upon the top of the baking-oven, moaning low.

Antek, one might say, was never at home, going out at dawn and returning only late at night. But she now felt

herself unable to say a single word to him. It was impossible: her soul, hardened, as it were, in the fire, had become like stone.

Only on the third day did she wake up, as out of a horrible dream. But how changed! Coming back from that trance of death, she was in appearance no longer the same person: grey, faded, wrinkled, many a year older in looks, and now hard and rigid as though she had been carved in wood. Only her eyes glowed, cold and keen; and her lips were set hard.—So thin had she grown that her clothes hung on her as upon a peg.

And thus she came back to life again. Although her former self was now burnt to ashes, she was aware within her soul of a wonderful power that she never had felt before—of a stubborn force of living and fighting, and of the settled certitude that she would overcome at last.

She at once flew to her wailing children, took them in her arms, and well-nigh smothered them with kisses; and she burst with them into a long sweet flood of tears that were a true relief to her, soothing her anguish greatly.

She quickly set the hut in order, and went round to Veronka to thank her for her kindness, and entreat her to forgive the past. They were at once good friends again, which her sister took as a matter of course. Not so the fact—the inexplicable fact—that Hanka never breathed a word of reproach against Antek, or even complained of her own sad fate.

"I feel like a widow now," she said; "I am alone, and must take thought for the little ones and for everything."

That same evening she went to see the Klembas and other acquaintances, and ask them how things were going on at Boryna's, whose words, so lately heard, were ever in her mind.

Instead, however, of going at once to him, she waited a few days more; and it was only when Ash-Wednesday had come round that she put on her best clothes, committed her little ones to Veronka's keeping, and—without even preparing breakfast—made ready to go out.



"Whither away so early?" Antek inquired.

"To the Ash-Wednesday service," she replied, slowly and evasively.

"Will you not get breakfast ready?"

"Get ye to the tavern; the Jew will give you credit still," she could not help answering: the words came out unawares.

He started up, as if he had got a blow; but she went out unheeding.

Now his shouts, his fury, affrighted her no more. He was a stranger, and so remote from her that she was herself astonished. And though, from time to time, something like the last flicker of her old fondness rose up in her heart from embers now covered over and trodden down, she at once quenched them by recalling the memory of her inexpiable wrongs.

When she entered the poplar road, the faithful were just repairing to church.

It was a singularly bright day for the season. The sun was just in the east; the thin surfaces which the night had frozen on the snows had not yet been melted by the thaw. From the thatches there hung strings as of glittering crystal beads; the waters, frozen in the roads and ditches, gleamed like so many mirrors, and the frosted trees sparkled in the sun. In the pure blue sky, there were suspended a multitude of tiny milk-white clouds, that floated in the light like a flock of sheep playing in a great field full of azure flax-blossoms. The air was pure, cold, and so bracing that inhaling it was a pleasure. The whole country-side looked gay, the pools glistened; the snows shone with glassy golden reflection; the children were frisking and sliding about with joyous cries; an old man here and there, propped against a wall, basked in the bright warm rays; even the dogs, as they chased the crows come to pick up food, barked with a merry bark.

But, on entering the church, Hanka passed immediately into an atmosphere of deep, cold, religious silence. A low mass was just being read at the high altar; and the people, devoutly attentive and lost in fervent prayer, formed a dense

crowd in the nave, upon which long streams of light were pouring down.

Hanka cared little to mix with the crowd then. She went into an aisle so gloomy that it had no light at all, save a few ice-cold streaks; for she desired to be alone with her own soul and with God. Down she knelt before a side-altar consecrated to the Assumption and, kissing the pavement, stretched out her arms, fixed her eyes on the sweet face of the "Mother of Mercy," and was soon absorbed in prayer.

And now at last, at the holy feet of her, the "Comforter of the Afflicted," she burst out into complaints, laying bare all the wounds of her soul with the deepest humility and the most boundless trust, and confessing all her sins from the bottom of her heart. Before our Lady—the Mother of the Polish Nation—she truly repented of all her transgressions. For lo! she had sinned, since she had been punished by the Lord Jesus!

"Aye, I have been unkind to my neighbours, I have set myself above them, quarrelled sometimes, and not been cleanly, and have loved good cheer, been lazy in working and slothful in God's service: I have sinned." Such was the fervent cry of her soul, bleeding with contrition, and she prayed most earnestly that God might forgive Antek's most grievous sins. Oh, how, and with what ardour, did she beg for mercy! Even as a fowl which, about to be killed, makes a frantic dash to the window beats at the panes, and pipes in a mournful voice, begging for its poor life!

Her whole frame shook with weeping; and from out of her soul, as from a bleeding wound, there poured a stream of prayers; and her tears, like blood-stained pearls, trickled down and watered the icy pavement.

Mass was over; and the whole congregation, deeply contrite, went forward to the altar railings, there to receive with bended heads the ashes with which the priest, uttering aloud a penitential prayer, crossed their brows as they knelt.

Without awaiting the close of the service, Hanka went



out, greatly strengthened, and full of trust in God's help.

With head erect, she replied to all who greeted her, and—bold and brave at last—met many a curious eye as she went by. But it was not without a quiver of emotion that she at length reached Boryna's enclosure.

Lord! how very long it was since she had been within! And yet, how many a time had she, sorrowfully and from afar, approached to have a glimpse of it! Now she could view all the place—cabin, outhouses, hedges, trees covered with hoar-frost—with eyes as full of affectionate remembrance as if all that had been part and parcel of her own being, of her life!

Her soul was glad and jocund within her. Scarcely had she got to the porch, when Lapa dashed out and jumped upon her, joyfully whining; and then Yuzka came out, astounded, and hardly believing her senses.

"Hanka! Good Lord! Hanka!"

"Yes, it is I: don't you know me?—Is Father in the house?"

"Surely, surely!—Ah, ye have come at last, ye have come, Hanka!" And the little lass fell a-weeping and kissing her hands, just as if she had been her own mother.

The old man, hearing her voice, came out and brought her into the cabin himself, asked about the children and was pained at what she had undergone. She presently became calmer, and told him everything without concealment. But she felt shocked at the change that he too had suffered; for he had aged a good deal, stooped much more, and looked faded and withered and thin. But his face still wore the same expression as of old, and was even full of more grim and dogged determination than before.

They had a long talk; and when, after an hour or so, Hanka prepared to go home, Boryna told Yuzka to make a large bundle of everything they could spare. It turned out to be so large that she could not carry it by herself; so Vitek had to take it on a toboggan. And, as she went out, Boryna thrust several *zloty* into her hands "for salt-money," and said:

"Come hither more often—every day, if ye can. No one knows what may happen to me, so pray look after the house. And Yuzka loves you."

Thereupon she went away, reflecting on his words as she went, and paying but little heed to Vitek's prattle. Yet he was telling her how the Voyt and the Soltys came daily to press Master to be reconciled to Yagna; how Master had even been at his Reverence's, along with Dominikova—who had afterwards conferred with him till very late the night before—and told her all the news he thought would interest her.

She found Antek still at home, repairing his boots. He did not even look up in her direction; but, on seeing Vitek and the pack, he said, tauntingly:

"Come back from begging, I see."

"Beggars have to beg."

But when Vitek came in, Antek, recognizing him, flew into a passion.

"Blood of a dog!—I forbade you to go to Father's!"

"He asked me himself—I went; he offered the things unasked—I accepted.—Am I, are the children, to die of hunger?—To you 'tis indifferent; but I will not have it."

"Take all that back again!" he shouted. "I want nothing from that man."

"You do not: I and the little ones do!"

"Take it back, I say, or I'll take it myself . . . aye, and thrust his charity down his throat to choke him! Do you hear? I'll throw all that stuff out of doors!"

"You dare to try! Lay but a finger on it, and you'll see!" she screamed, catching up the tiny house-mangle, ready to defend, tooth and nail, the things given her. So dangerous did she look, so infuriated, that he shrank back in confusion at this unexpected resistance.

"He has bought you cheap," he growled. "Very cheap. —For a bit of bread, as one lures a dog!"

"You have sold us—and yourself—cheaper still: for Yagna's . . . petticoat!" she burst out.—Antek started, as though stabbed. And then Hanka seemed suddenly to have gone raving mad. In a torrent of words she overwhelmed



him with every wrong he had ever done to her, and with a host of remembrances and grievances she had never yet spoken of; unsparingly, passing over not one single fault or unkindness; beating him so unmercifully with the flail of her speech that, if she could, she would have beaten him to death on the spot.

He stood aghast at her mad rage; and he felt something, too, that was tearing at his heart. With bowed head he listened, dismayed, and a bitter sense of shame burned his soul; then he snatched up his cap and fled out of the hut.

It was long ere he could make out what strange transformation had come over her. As a dog spurned from the door, he ran away, never thinking where he went, to wander about aimlessly, as indeed was his daily custom.

For since that terrible hour of the conflagration, a fearful thing had come into being within him: he was, so to speak, a prey to secret insanity. He no longer went to his work, although the miller had several times sent for him; he did nothing but wander about the country-side, or sit drinking in the tavern, continually revolving in his mind thoughts of bloody vengeance, and his soul was full of nothing else.

He was even indifferent to the suspicions of arson which sullied his name.

"Let anyone dare to utter them to my face . . . let him but dare!" he had cried to Matthew in the tavern, loud enough for all present to hear.

The heifer which remained to him he had sold to a Jew, and drunk the price of it with his associates; for he had now for pot-companions all the riff-raff in Lipka; such vile fellows as, for instance, Bartek Koziol, or Philip (from over the water), Francis, the miller's man, or those, the lowest of all, the jail-birds, Gulbasowa's sons—men always ready for any act of debauchery, always prowling like wolves about the country-side, seeking what they could snap up and barter to the Jew for a few drams. But he cared little what they were: they kept him company, and fawned upon

him as spaniels fawn on their masters. He did indeed give one or another a thrashing now and then; but he willingly stood them drinks and protected them against other folk.

The gang shortly committed so many lawless acts and breaches of the peace that complaints were made every day to the Voyt, and even to his Reverence.

Matthew cautioned him, but unavailingly. Vainly, too, had Klemba, out of pure kindness, besought him to stop in time, and not ruin his life for ever. He listened to no one, did more and more desperate deeds, drank yet harder, and had become the dread of the whole village.

In short, he was rolling swiftly to his destruction down a precipitous hill. All Lipka had their eyes upon him—eyes of suspicion and apprehension. As to the fire, indeed, they were divided in opinion; but they saw with their own eyes the deeds he undoubtedly did, and their animosity increased daily; besides, the smith was always inciting them against him. Even his former friends soon began to hold aloof from him; but to Antek, blinded by the lust of revenge, that was all one.

And over and above this, as if to spite all men, he continued his relations with Yagna. Was it love that attracted him? or what was it? God knows: but they met in Dominkova's barn: without her knowledge, indeed, but willingly abetted by Simon, who hoped that Antek would help him to get Nastka for his wife.

Those meetings were unwillingly consented to by Yagna. With the wales of her husband's castigation still fresh upon her, she had no mind for love-making; but she feared Antek, who had sent her word that, unless she came at every call of his, he would go to her hut, and in broad daylight and in public administer a chastisement yet more severe than Boryna's had been!

As the saying is: "For the authors of their fall, sinners have no love at all"; but she feared his threat, and was forced to go.

This state of things, however, did not last long. The



second day of Lent, Simon came in haste to the tavern and, taking Antek aside, told him that Yagna had just been reconciled to her goodman and returned to his cabin.

If a club had crashed down on his skull, it would not have stunned him more than this news. She had met him the very day before, and had said no word of this.

"So! she left me in the dark!" he thought, and hurried away to Boryna's as soon as evening had fallen.

He prowled for a long time about his father's premises, looking for her and waiting by the stile; but she was not to be seen. This irritated him so violently that he boldly pulled up a stake and entered the enclosure, ready to proceed to any extremity—even to go into the hut; in fact, he was in the passage, with his hand on the latch . . . when an unknown feeling of dread drove him from the door! His father's face had come before him with such sudden vividness that he started back in terror from that mental image.

What it was that had come over him, and why he had quailed now again, just as on that former night beside the pond, he was all his life unable to understand.

On the following days too, he got no sight of her, although he watched by the stile, and lurked about there for whole evenings together, like a wolf.

Sunday come round, and he waited for a long while in front of the church: but she did not appear.

The thought struck him that he might perhaps meet her at Vespers, and get speech with her somehow. So he went.

He was rather late. Evensong had already begun. The church was full, and so dark that the daylight, now dying, only lit the topmost vaults. A few tiny rushlights had been kindled here and there, to read by; in front of the high altar, brilliantly illuminated, the people were thronging close. He elbowed his way as far as the sanctuary railings, and looked furtively round for Yagna; but she was nowhere in sight. Instead, he caught many a look of curiosity directed towards himself.

They were chanting the "Bitter Lamentations," for it was

the first Sunday in Lent. The priest was sitting, surpliced and book in hand, beside the altar, and more than once cast a stern look in his direction.

The organ was pealing forth soul-stirring music, and the whole congregation lifted up their voices in unison. Now and then the chant was interrupted, the music stopped playing, and from high above in the organ-loft a broken voice was heard, reading out a meditation on the Passion of our Lord.

But Antek heard nothing now. Little by little, he had forgotten where he was and why he had come; the chants had sunk into his soul, and unstrung him strangely. A sense of numbness overpowered him, together with a feeling of deep quiet, as though he had escaped and flown somewhere very far away—into some region full of light. And whenever he came to himself and opened his eyes, he met the eyes of the priest, always fixed on him; and that look was so piercing that Antek turned away his heavy drowsy head, and began to fall once more into his torpor. Suddenly he woke up at the sound of a well-known chant:

"Behold! the Lord of heaven hangs crucified:  
Weep for thy sins, O man! for them He died!"

As if issuing from one single colossal throat, the chant—an immense wave of sound—came bursting forth with such vehement lamentation, so clamorous a wail, that the very walls vibrated to that cry!

Long did they sing thus and the walls echoed with dolorous reverberations, and sighs, and earnest sobbing prayers.

Antek no longer felt drowsy, but a heavy resistless sense of sorrow surged over his soul with such potency that it was all he could do to restrain the tears which started to his eyes; and he was about to leave the church, when the organ again ceased playing, and the priest, standing in front of the altar, began to speak.

The people were pressing forward in so densely packed a



crowd that it was now impossible to get away, and Antek was pushed up against the railing. A great hush fell upon all; every word the priest said was distinctly audible. He spoke first of our Lord's Passion, and then passed on to inveigh against sin, waving his arms with threatening gestures, from time to time looking hard at Antek, who stood right in front of him, though somewhat lower, spellbound by the priest's burning glances, and unable to take his eyes off him.

In the audience there was presently a noise of weeping and sighing, the holy Name of Jesus was invoked, and even groans were heard. Meanwhile the priest spoke ever louder and with greater sternness; he seemed to them to have waxed somehow taller; lightnings shot from his eyes, and he lifted up his hands, and his words fell like stones hurled from them, and, like red-hot irons, they burnt into the hearts. He spoke of their wickedness and manifold transgressions; of the hardened sinners who lived amongst them; of their forgetfulness of God's commandments, their eternal quarrels and fights and drunken bouts. He exhorted them with great zeal, making them tremble in themselves, so that all hearts were melted with sorrow; tears fell like dew, and there was a low ripple of weeping, and sighs of contrition arose.—Then the priest suddenly bent forward towards Antek, and with a mighty voice cried out against unnatural sons, who burned down the homes of their own fathers; and against seducers and all such men of iniquity, whom (he said) neither the everlasting fires nor the judgments of men would fail to punish.

All the congregation were struck with awe and held their breath. Every eye was cast upon Antek like a fiery dart. He, white as a sheet, and scarcely able to breathe, stood stiffly upright, the words smiting him as if the church were falling about his ears. He looked round, as though to find help; but there was now an empty space round him, lined only by menacing or terrified faces. The folk shrank from him, as from one stricken with the plague.—And now the priest cried aloud, calling him to repentance, beseeching,

imploring, adjuring him. Finally, turning again to the people, he exhorted them with outstretched arms to beware of a man so infamous, to protect themselves against him, to refuse him fire, water, food—aye, and not to let him so much as darken their doors. "For such a one would taint you all; ye would all grow foul at his touch; and, should he not mend his ways, atone for his misdeeds and do penance, then ought ye to pluck him out as ye weed stinging nettles, and cast him forth to his perdition!"

At those words, Antek suddenly turned round; the people fell away from him right and left, and he passed out by the lane thus made, while the priest's voice followed, smiting him as with a scourge that drew blood at each stroke.

A wild cry of despair echoed at that moment through the church; but Antek did not hear it. He walked out as fast as he could, fearing lest he should fall dead with agony—fearing those eyes that glowed, fearing that awful voice.

He went out into the highway and on to the poplar road, leading to the woods. From time to time, he paused afrighted: he still could hear that voice, which rang in his ears like a knell.

It was a cold and windy night. The poplars were rocking noisily; sometimes a bough struck him across the face; and when the gale fell, there came a cold thin March rain that drizzled in his eyes. But Antek went on his way unheeding, bewildered, amazed, filled with unspeakable awe.

"Things are now at their worst!" he muttered at last, coming to a standstill. "Yes, he was right! he was right!"

"O Jesus! My Jesus!" he shrieked, seizing his head in his hands with a sudden clutch. At that instant he had seen as in a flash all the horror of his sins, and was torn with an unearthly sense of humiliation.

He sat for a long time brooding under a tree, gazing into the night and listening to the low, tremulous, eerie music of the waving trees.

A convulsion of rage and hatred seized him. "It is all through that man—that man!" he exclaimed, his former



resentment springing up anew, and all those cravings for revenge spreading over his mind again, dark as the clouds that overspread the sky.

"Never will I forgive him! no, never!" he bellowed, his recklessness returning. And he at once started up, to go back to the village.

The church was now locked; the cabin-windows shone bright. As he went by, he passed several knots of people, who, in spite of the rain, stood engaged in eager talk.

On passing the tavern, he looked in at the window, saw there was plenty of company inside, and went in boldly, as if there had been nothing amiss. But when he approached the largest group with greetings, only one or two shook hands with him; the others hastily withdrew and left the place.

In a minute, he was all but alone in the tavern. Besides the Jew behind the bar, there was only a *Dziad* sitting by the fire.

He had driven them all away! It was a bitter pill, but he swallowed it, and ordered some vodka; then, laying down the glass untouched, he rushed out.

He strayed along the banks of the pond, eyeing with a vacant stare the long fiery streaks which, from the lighted windows, swept over the wet snow and glistened on the water with which the ice was now covered.

Gentler thoughts came to him. His heart felt unspeakably heavy: he was so terribly alone, so much in want of human converse, of some fireside to sit by, that he went straight to Ploshka's cabin, the first along his way.

A large assembly was there; but, when he entered, they all started to their feet in dismay. Even Staho, who was there too, could not find a word to say to him.

He muttered: "Ye stare at me as if I were a murderer!" and went out to the next hut, which was Balcerek's.

Here they received him with the utmost frigidity, mumbling some inarticulate words in response to his greeting, and not even asking him to be seated.

He looked in at several huts in this way, and with the

same result. As a last resource, and to leave no drop of pain and humiliation untasted, he went to see Matthew. But the man was not in; and his mother at once, and from the very threshold, stormed at him and drove him out like a dog.

He answered not a word, nor did he indeed feel any resentment now; for the time, all bitterness had left him. He plodded on slowly through the darkness, stopping at times to look around him on the village, bright with many a lighted window, at which, and at the lowly huts that rose on every side, he gazed in bewilderment, as though he had never seen them before. In those hedgerows, those orchards, those lights, resided a strange spell, which somehow chained him to the spot. It was incomprehensible, but he experienced a resistless power that had seized hold of him and bound him to the land—which made him bow his neck to the yoke, and filled him with an inexplicable dread.

He eyed those lamplit windows, and terror possessed his soul. They were all watching him, he thought; they were peering at him, following him, to fetter and enslave him with adamant chains. He was no longer able to flee, nor to move, nor to cry out. He leaned back against a tree; and there, crushed with anguish, he listened . . . and heard—from all the homesteads, the shadows around them, the fields, nay, even the heavens themselves—those same words of pitiless condemnation, now ratified by the whole population of Lipka!

"It is just! it is just!" he said, huskily, humbled to the dust, and from the inmost depths of his miserable heart, struck with mortal fear of that almighty Power—the Voice of the Many.

By degrees all the lights went out, and the village fell asleep. It drizzled still, and drops pattered from the drooping trees. Occasionally a dog would utter a short bark, in the midst of the stillness that reigned everywhere. Then Antek, returning to complete consciousness, suddenly started to his feet.

"Yes, he spoke justly; he said the truth as it was in



him. But I will not let the other go scot-free—not I! Blood of a dog! whatever happens, he shall pay!”

His words were a frenzied shriek, and he shook his fist at Lipka and at the whole world.

Settling his cap on his head, he made again for the tavern.

## CHAPTER XIII

SPRING was drawing nigh. March had come, with its own most foul weather—quagmire, chilly, foggy; with its daily falls of sleet, its daily thick, shaggy, dingy mists, creeping along over the fields, and quenching all light so thoroughly that the whole day, from grey dawn to dusky twilight, was equally dark. Or, if at rare intervals the sun peered, half drowned, out of those sombre abysses, it was but for the space of one Ave Maria; and ere one's soul could rejoice in the splendour, one's body in the warmth of it, down came the dusk once more upon the world, down swept the winds afresh, and the "fog and filthy air" resumed their reign.

Folk were sorely troubled at this, for they had lived in hope that, after a week or two, spring would get the upper hand and make amends for all they had suffered. And, meantime, the roofs let the rain in, the water came through walls and windows, and poured on every side. In despair they saw it creep in from the fields, fill all the ditches even to brimming over, make the roads gleam and glitter like waterways, come round through the hedgerows, and stand about the farm-yards in deep miry pools. And as the snow continued to melt and the rain to fall, the thawed ground soon softened to such a degree that in many farm-yards there were mud-pits without number at noontide, and folk had to lay boards outside the huts, or bridge the approaches with trusses of straw.

Nor were the nights less unbearable, with their downpours and their black darkness—so thick that one might fancy light had gone out for ever. Few lit fires in the evening; weary of the wretched weather, all went to bed at nightfall—and Lipka was in palpable obscurity. True, in a



few huts they assembled to spin: there the windows gleamed, and the low chant of the "Lamentations" quavered, together with other mournful hymns on the sufferings of Jesus. They were accompanied by the blasts, the pattering rain, and the trees lashing one against the other through the enclosures.

No wonder if Lipka was lost in this sea of slush: the huts were so lowly, they scarce rose out of the ground where they crouched, dank, dingy, wretched to look upon. And, as to the lands and gardens and roads and sky, there was so much water everywhere that no one could distinguish anything from anything else.

The weather was bleak, besides; it chilled the very bones, and few cared to meet it. The blasts blew, the rain pattered, the trees rocked in a solitude; for all the voices heard, Lipka might as well have been a place of the dead. Only the cattle lowed sometimes over their empty mangers; or cocks fell a-crowing; or ganders, parted from their brooding mates, would cry aloud and indignantly.

The days were longer; but this only made the time hang more heavily on people's hands. No one had any work to do, except the few who laboured at the saw-mill or carried timber for the miller from the forest. The others lounged about the cabins, sitting at their neighbours' till the day dragged on to its close. Some of the older men took to getting ploughs, or harrows, or other such implements, ready for spring; but the work went on slowly and lifelessly, all being equally exasperated by the foul weather. And troubled at heart, besides; for the lands sown in autumn were in a pitiful state; and—especially in the low-lying fields—parts of the crops were frozen. Some of the farmers, too, were getting to the end of their provender, and famine was looking in at the byres. Others had found that all their stock of potatoes was frost-nipped. Others, again, had their huts full of sick folk; and for many the days of starvation which often usher in the spring seemed at hand.

So in more than one cabin warm meals were served only

once a day; and people went to the miller in ever-increasing numbers to borrow a few bushels of flour that they were to pay for later in work. He was, indeed, a confounded extortioner; but no one had either ready money, or things to sell in town. Others went whining to Yankel, begging him to lend them a screw of salt, or a quart of groats, or a loaf of bread, putting their pride in their pockets; for, as the proverb runs: "When it comes to the worst, Goodman Belly is first."

So many of the folk were in want, and there was no work for them to do! The peasant-farmers themselves had none to give. The Squire was resolved not to let one man of Lipka earn a kopek in his forest, and remained unmoved even by the prayers of a large deputation. And thus, both amongst the *Komorniki* and the poorer peasant land-owners, the misery became so great that many a one thanked God that he still had potatoes, and salt to season them with—though with bitter tears into the bargain!

Therefore there was now much heart-burning in the village, with quarrelling and conflicts as well. People were restless, uncertain of the morrow, and sorely agitated, everyone seeking to satisfy the greed which gnawed at his heart by snatching whatever he could from his neighbour.

Over and above all this, the village was afflicted with many sicknesses, as is often the case just before spring; for at that time noxious vapours rise up from the thawing ground. Smallpox swooped down first, like a hawk on a brood of goslings, slaying the little ones. Both the youngest children of the Voyt were taken, in spite of the doctors whom he called in. Then the grown-ups were assailed by many diseases, and to such an extent that in every other cabin someone lay moaning, in expectation of the grave and trusting to the mercy of God. Dominikova was overcharged with patients.—And, just then, the cows' time for calving came round, and many a woman was brought to bed: so that the distress and confusion in the village became very great.

People were accordingly looking forward to spring with



ever more and more impatience. All were sure that, as soon as the snows had melted, and the lands were thawed and dry, and the sun shone bright so that they could go out to plough, all their trouble and distress would be over at last.

But that year they remarked that the spring was slower to come than usual. The rain never ceased, the ground thawed very slowly; and besides—a bad sign, foreboding a long winter!—even now, the kine had not begun to shed their hair.

Therefore, whenever there came a single hour of dry weather and radiant sun, the villagers came swarming out of their huts and gazed up into the sky and wondered whether this change would last at all. The old folk basked in the bright beams to warm their tottering limbs, and all the little ones ran out along the roads in noisy crowds, like colts let into the meadows for the first time in spring.

How merry and jocund and full of glee they all were then!

The whole land lay in the genial warmth, and all the waters were bathed in light; the ditches seemed brimful of molten sun; the ice on the pond, washed by the rains, looked like a huge dish of blackened tinware; the trees sparkled with yet undried dew; the furrow-streaked fields spread out, quiet and dark of hue, but already inhaling the warmth, and swollen with the spring-tide and the sparkling murmurous waters. The snows, too, still unmelted here and there, shone with crude whiteness, like linen laid out to bleach: the azure sky revealed its depths, hitherto veiled in mists, and hidden under a web of gossamer, as it were; now the eyes could sound its infinite blue fields, or glance over to the dark horizon and the wavy outline of the woods.

And the world around was panting with joy; for such sweet spring odours were wafted all about them that a cry of happiness gushed from the hearts of men, and their souls aspired to soar upwards in the sunlight, like those birds

they saw coming from somewhere in the far-away east and floating in the crystal air. Every man came out of doors with delight, and took pleasure in talking, even with one who was no friend to him.

For at that moment all bickerings were done with, all quarrels appeased: everyone felt full of loving-kindness towards everyone. Cries of gladness echoed from hut to hut, and trilled through the balmy air.

Then did they throw the cabin-doors wide open, and remove the windows from their clamped fastenings to let in the air; the women took their spinning-gear outside, and even the babes were carried out in their cradles to get some sunlight. From the byres, again and again, there floated the anxious lowing of the kine; horses neighed, eager to quit their stables; cocks crowed in the hedges, and dogs, barking wildly, ran about like mad, and splashed with the children in the mud.

Their elders, staying within the enclosures, blinked in the dazzling sunbeams, and looked with delight at the country round, all bathed in splendour. Women chatted together over their orchard-fences, and their voices resounded afar. They told how someone had heard the song of a lark, how wagtails had been seen on the poplar road—and then another caught sight of a string of wild geese far up in the sky, and half the village ran out to look at them—and a third affirmed that storks had already alighted on the flats by the mill. This was doubted, for March had not yet begun its third week. And then a lad brought in the first spray of blossoms, and ran with it round to every hut, where they gloated over the pale clusters in deep admiration, as over some most sacred thing.

So that illusory spell of warmth had made them all believe that spring was at their gates, and that presently they would be ploughing their fields. Their dismay and mortification were therefore all the more intense, when they saw the sky suddenly clouded over, the sun quite hidden from sight, all the brightness faded, the land darkened once more,



and a thin rain beginning to fall! With the coming of night, the rain was followed by snow; and very shortly the village and its environs were whitened over anew.

Things were again in their former state; and the subsequent days of slush and mire and wet made them feel almost as though the past hours of sunshine had been only a bright dream.

Whilst folks were spending their days in such hopes and desires, and joys so soon doomed to disappointment, it was quite natural that Antek's conduct, the domestic troubles of Boryna, and all the rest—even to the deaths which took place—should fall into forgetfulness, like a stone flung into a deep lake: every man had enough worries of his own, and scarcely knew how to bear them.

But the days rolled on, neither stopping nor hurrying, without end, without commencement, as the waves of a great sea: hardly had they opened their eyes and looked round, and taken note of a few things (how few!), when twilight was there again, and night, and then another day dawned with its own fresh troubles. And all was repeated once more, that the will of God might be accomplished upon earth!

One day—it was about Mid-Lent—the weather was at its very worst. True, only a drizzle of rain fell; but the worn-out folk were in a state of extreme and bitter restlessness, moving to and fro as men possessed, looking forth sullenly at their world covered with clouds so louring that, as they swept bellying past, they brushed the tree-tops. All was sad, cold, darksome, dripping with wet, and wringing every heart with uncontrollable aversion. Nobody quarrelled with anyone that day; no one cared for anything at all: everyone longed for some quiet nook where he could lie down and think of nothing.

The whole day had been gloomy, as the eyes of a sick man who wakes, glances round, and falls again to the darkness of lethargy. Scarcely had the noonday Angelus rung, when a sullen rain-bearing wind rose and smote upon the dark-hued shadowy cabins.

No one was out of doors. The gusts, with their quick flaws of rain, swept shrieking over the mire, churning it up, and pelting the shaken trees and the smirched walls as with handfuls of corn flung down: while the pond was wrestling with the broken ice-pack, pounding and tossing on its shores, with a growling gurgling rumble.

But on the evening of that same day, a rumour flew through the village that the Squire was hewing down the peasants' part of the forest!

At first, no one would believe it. The thing had not been attempted till then: how could it be done now, when March was half over, the ground a quagmire, and the trees swelling with sap?

True, men were at work in the forest; but, as all knew, it was quite another sort of work.

And then the Squire, no matter what he was called, had never been called a fool by anyone.

Could the man, then, be such a fool as to try floating the timber down . . . in March?

All the same, the village was upset with this report, and doors banged, and mud was waded through, and the news travelled from cabin to cabin. They stood talking of it upon the highway, they went to think it over in the tavern . . . and also to question the Jew on the matter. But the crafty "yellow one" swore he knew nothing whatever about it. A great outcry was made, evil words were spoken, the women lamented, and public indignation, fury, excitement and fear continued to increase.

Finally, old Klemba decided to get the news verified, and sent two of his sons on horseback to the forest as scouts, in spite of the bad weather.

It was long ere they returned. From every hut, someone went out to watch the forest in the direction they had taken. But twilight had deepened into darkness, and they were not yet back. The village was full of a stillness, ominous of passions all the more dangerous because thus reined in. Every soul was now smouldering with the fiercest animosity; for, though no one quite believed this disastrous



rumour to be true, they all expected it might be confirmed; and many were the curses and slammings of doors, as one after another went to see if the boys were returning.

Kozlova bustled about everywhere, and upheld the truth of the rumour to anyone that would listen to her talk, swearing by all the saints that she had with her own eyes seen a good many acres of peasants' forest hewn down already. She appealed to Yagustynka, who had lately been very much hand-in-glove with her, and of course confirmed her words, as rejoicing in every broil and disturbance, the hag! And she then, having picked up some more items of gossip at various places, went to carry them to Boryna's.

The lamp was just lit in the work-room; Yuzka was peeling potatoes, Vitek assisting her; Yagna was busied in household duties. Somewhat later, Boryna came in, and old Yagustynka told him of all she had heard, with very many additions. He did not say one word to her in reply, but, turning to Yagna, "Take a spade," he said, "and go to help Pete; the water must be let out of the orchard, or it will be pouring into the potato-pits.—Off with you instantly, I say!" he cried.

Yagna mumbled some objections; but he gave her such a look that she had to run out directly; he following her steps to overlook the work, and soon audible, storming about the byre, the stable and the potato-pits.

"Is the old man always so cantankerous?" Yagustynka queried, raking up the fire.

"He is," Yuzka said, as she listened to his voice in fear.

It was the truth. Since he had taken back his wife—which he had done so readily that folk wondered—he had altered beyond recognition. Always had he been a hard man, and a stubborn; but now he had turned into stone. Yes, he had taken her back, and without one word of reproach; only now she was for him simply a serving-wench—nothing more. She had tried endearments upon him: they had failed. Nor did her charms avail her any more than peevishness, or those fits of petulance and tantrums, the weapons of women against men. To them he paid no

heed whatever, and treated her as a stranger, and no wedded wife: so much so, that he no longer troubled what she did, though perfectly aware that she still met Antek.

He did not even watch over her. A few days after the "reconciliation," he had driven to town, returning only the next day; and folk whispered that he had been at the notary's and drawn some document or other; some even surmising that he had revoked his deed of gift in Yagna's favour. As a matter of fact, none but Hanka knew the truth, and she kept it dark. She was now in such favour with her father-in-law that he confided everything he did to her. She saw him nearly every day, and the children almost made their home there, often sleeping with their grandfather, who loved them dearly.

Perhaps as a consequence of this change, Boryna's health seemed to be quite restored. He stooped no longer, as he had done of late; his glance was again as proud as of old. But now he had become so choleric besides, that he would fly out on the slightest provocation. His hand was heavy on everybody, and when he laid it on anyone, that one must bend even to the ground; and all things be done according to his will.

Not that he treated people unjustly; but gentleness was not in his line any more. He had taken the reins into his own hands, and never let them go for an instant. He kept a watchful eye on the stores, and yet more on his pocket, doling out everything in person, and looking carefully to prevent all waste. Harsh to everyone at home, he was especially so to Yagna, never expressed himself as being pleased with her, and drove her to work as they drive a lazy horse. No day passed without its squabble; often, very often, his leather girdle came into play, or even something still harder; for Yagna was possessed by a devil of contradiction, and did her best to spite him.

Obey him she did, for she could not help it; and how could she resist? "Who eats her husband's bread must do her husband's will." But for one sharp word of his she gave him ten. The cabin was really turned into a hell; it



seemed as if they both enjoyed making it so, each striving to the uttermost, and eager to put the other down, both equally headstrong and unyielding.

Dominikova quite unavailingly attempted to come between them and effect a true reconciliation. It was out of the question: the feelings of wrongs, of cruel treatment, and of mutual hatred rankled too deep within their hearts.

All Boryna's fondness had gone where last year's spring-tide was. He had only the lively remembrance of her betrayal, undying humiliation, and absolutely implacable malice. Yagna's mind, too, was very greatly changed. She felt unspeakably miserable; but she had not yet admitted that she was to blame! Her punishment was harder for her than it would have been for others, because she was more affectionate of heart, had been more delicately brought up, and was naturally daintier than most women.

And she suffered, Lord! how terribly!

True, she employed every means to vex her husband, never gave way unless under compulsion, and defended herself tooth and nail; but daily the yoke grew heavier and heavier; it galled her to the quick, and there was no escape. Many a time she had wanted to return to her mother, but the latter was so strongly opposed to such a step that she threatened to send her back to her husband by force, at the end of a rope!

What, then, was she to do? She could not take up the attitude so many women in her position take, willingly supporting hell at home for pleasure with sweethearts, full and free: a fight every day, and a reconciliation when night comes round.

No, that would have been too loathsome to her. Yet her present state was growing steadily more and more insupportable, and her craving for something new—she knew not what—increased as steadily.

She gave Boryna spite for spite. Nevertheless, she lived in continual terror, oppressed by such a sense of injustice and such bitter sorrow that she often wept for whole nights, watering her pillow with tears; while by day those per-

petual brawls and conflicts were not infrequently so hateful to her that she only dreamed of fleeing away somewhither—far, far away!

Somewhither! Aye, but whither?

Yes, the world stretched wide around her; but that world—it was such an appalling, unknown, unfathomable vagueness that the mere thought of it frightened her to death.

It was this which still drew her towards Antek, though what she felt was not so much love as terror and despair. In that fearful night, when she had fled to her mother's, something within her had burst and perished, so to speak; and now she could no longer fly to him with her whole heart, as she had done before; no more could she run to him at every call with joyfully beating heart. She went only from a sense of necessity—because the cabin was dull and wearisome, because she hated her husband—because she fancied that her former immense love might perhaps come to life again. In her inmost heart she felt bitter against him. Her present wretched position, the hard life she was leading now, her blighted reputation—all were due to him; and, moreover, she realized the fact that he was not that which she had adored, and she knew the fierce pangs of disenchantment and disillusion. He had formerly seemed to her quite another being—one whose fondness lifted her up to heaven, whose kindness overmastered her—the sweetest, dearest being in all the world. And now she saw he was just the same as any other peasant. Worse, indeed; for she was more afraid of him than even of her husband. He frightened her by his dark moods, by his fits of desolation, and, above all, by his reckless violence. He made her tremble, for he was, in her eyes, wild and fierce as a forest outlaw. Why, the priest himself had rebuked him publicly in church; the whole village had shrank away from him, and now pointed him out as the worst amongst them; and there proceeded out of him such an exhalation of mortal sin that the mere sound of his voice often made her faint with dread: it seemed to her as though Satan dwelt in him, and as if around him there hovered all the host of hell. At



those moments she had such impressions as when his Reverence told the people about the awful torments of the lost!

Not for one instant did it come home to her that she had part in his guilt: not in the least! When she thought of him, it was but to mourn that he had so greatly changed, and her feelings on that score became so strong that she cared for him ever less and less. At times, when embraced by him, she would stiffen suddenly, as if struck dead by a thunderbolt. She let him kiss her—for how could she resist such a dragon of a man? Moreover, she felt young, full-blooded, of lively temperament . . . and his kisses were so violent, they well-nigh choked her. So, in spite of all, she would still give him her love with the mighty elemental craving of the earth that thirsts eternally for warm rain and sunshine; but yet her inner self was no more at his feet, driven by that former uncontrollable impulse; she was no more given up to that blind rapture which once upon a time had made her feel nigh death; she was nevermore again to be so frantically lovesick. At such times, her thoughts would fly to the hut, to her work, to some new invention to spite her husband; and at times she even thought: "When will this man leave me and go away?"

These thoughts about him were in her mind as she was working to keep the water out of the potato-pits. Her work was only for the eye, and as in duty bound. Pete toiled with a will, battling noisily with the mud and the frozen earth; she worked that Boryna might see her. No sooner had he left the place than she put her apron over her head, and went cautiously round to the stile, close to Ploshka's barn.

There stood Antek.

"I have been waiting an hour for you," he said reproachfully.

"No need to wait at all, if they want you anywhere," she rapped out, in no pleasant humour.

He caught her in a powerful grasp, and gave her a kiss. She turned from him in disgust.

"Ye reek of vodka like a barrel of the same."

"Are ye so dainty that my lips offend you now?"

"'Twas but the vodka that I had in mind," she answered in a gentler tone.

"I was here yestereve. Wherefore did ye not come?"

"It was cold; and besides, I am over head and ears in work."

"And you have to fondle the old man," Antek growled, "and tuck him up in bed!"

"Why not?" she replied testily. "He is my husband."

"Yagna, do not provoke me!"

"If my words vex you, why come at all? Think not that I shall weep for you!"

"Ah, that means you do not care to come any more."

"Not if I am to be treated as a dog, and always chid."

"Yagna, I have so many troubles of my own that 'tis no great wonder if a harsh word drops from me now and then; but I mean no offence," he said humbly, gathering her in his arms. She, however, remained frigid and sulky, and only unwillingly returned his kisses. At every word she spoke, she looked around, seeking to go home.

This he was not slow to note, and a nettle thrust into his bosom would not have stung him more. He whispered, in a tone of timid reproach:

"You were not always in such a hurry!"

"I am afraid. All the people are at home: perhaps they will come out to look for me."

"Aye, aye! But there was a time when you did not fear to stay out all night. Oh, how you have changed!"

"Nonsense! What should have changed me?"

They were silent, each embracing the other, and sometimes with a closer hug of sudden fondness which the memory of past times called up; and they sought each other's lips with strong desire of love. But it would not do. Their souls were drifting farther and farther apart; each harboured bitter grudges against the other, and their wounds rankled so that their arms instinctively fell to their sides. They stood close, but like pillars of ice together; while words of tenderness and passion rose to their lips (but went no



farther and died unuttered), their hearts were throbbing with sharp pain.

"Yagna," he said, very low, "do you love me?"

"Why, I have already told you I cannot always come when you call," she answered evasively; and yet she pressed closer to him—feeling sorry, regretful, almost ready to ask his pardon with tears for not being able to love him any more. He read her meaning; and her words chilled him to the marrow, and he quivered with the pang they gave him; resentment burst out in his heart, and with it came reproaches and invectives which he could not choke down, and a torrent of angry words.

"You are a living lie! They all have fallen away from me, and so have you!—Love me? Aye, even as a dog that bares its teeth to bite loves me! Yes, I have seen through you clearly, and this I know: if folk were minded to slay me, you'd be the first to lend a rope; if to stone me, you'd throw the first stone!"

"Antek!" she cried, aghast.

"Be still, and hear me out!" he said sternly. "I have spoken the truth. . . . And since it has come to this—well, then, there now is naught in the world that I care for!"

"I must be off; they are calling me," she stammered, alarmed and trying to make her escape. But he seized her arm, so that she could not move, and went on in harsh menacing tones:

"This, moreover, do I tell you . . . for you have not then sense to see it for yourself: If I have fallen so low as this, it is through you—mark well—through you! . . . Because of you, the priest has rebuked me and driven me from the church! Because of you, the whole village shrinks from me as from one smitten with the plague. . . . I have borne all . . . all. . . . Nor did I take revenge when he—that father of mine—gave into your hands so much of the land that's my own! . . . And now—now—you loathe me! Aye, turn and writhe and twist it as you will, you lie!—You are like the rest of them, you look on me as they do, and fear me as if I were a robber or a slayer of men!

"What you want is another man: nay, ye would have them all at your heels . . . like dogs in the springtime—you!" he screamed, beside himself with rage. And then he overwhelmed her with the agonies and the venomous thoughts he had fed on for so long, making her responsible for all, and cursing her for his sufferings, until at last his anger choked his voice and maddened him so, that he rushed upon her with uplifted fists. But, stopping short just in time, he flung her back against the wall—and strode off!

"O Lord!—Antek!" she cried, realizing all at once what he meant; and, darting after him, she put her arms round his neck in despair. But he cast her off as one shakes off a leech, and hastened away without a word; while she fell to the ground, crushed and broken as if the whole universe had fallen upon her.

After some time, however, she came in some sort to her senses; but the feeling of deep injustice she had suffered and of the wrong undergone was so keen in her that her heart was broken with grief. She felt herself suffocating, and wanted to cry out to the whole world that she was blameless and had done no evil!

She called aloud after him, although his steps were no longer to be heard; she lifted up her voice, but in vain.

Her deep distress, her heart-felt sorrow, and the dull, crushing, terribly cruel thought that he might possibly never return to her, together with her dead fondness that had come to life again, all descended upon her now, with a tremendous weight of unappeasable torment; and she wept loudly as she walked home, caring not who might hear her.

In the porch she met Klemba's son, who only just peeped into the cabin, shouting: "They are cutting down our forest!" and hurried on to the next hut.

The news spread like wildfire through Lipka, and gripped all hearts, filling them with fierce anger. Men ran through the village with the news, so fast that doors were opening and slamming every instant.

Truly, it was a matter of life and death to the villagers,



and of such evil import that they were all at once struck dumb—or, rather, thunderstruck. They walked in fear, on tiptoe, spoke in whispers, looking with apprehension at one another, and listening likewise. No one cried out yet, nor complained aloud, nor broke out into curses. The thing was overwhelming, they all knew, and of the greatest moment—one in which women's babbling could do nothing. What was required was wise determination and resolve on the part of the whole community.

It was late; but no one cared to go to bed now. Some had left their supper unfinished, the household work unaccomplished. The roads were full of people, as were also the cabin surroundings. Men walked about on the banks of the pond, and their subdued whispers and mutterings were audible in the twilight as the buzzing of angry bees.

And now the weather was better; the rain had stopped, the sky had cleared up a little; flocks of clouds were moving across the sky, and on the earth a chilly wind blew, freezing the ground, and whitening with hoar-frost the black skeletons of the trees. The voices, too, though not loud, were now more distinctly heard.

It was at once known in the village that a number of peasant-landowners had assembled and gone in a body to see the Voyt.

There was Vinciorek, with Gregory, called the Lamé One; they saw Michael Caban, passing along with Franek Bylitsa, cousin to Hanka's father; and Soho too, and also Valek the Wry-mouthed; likewise Joseph Vahnik, Casimir Sikora—even time-honoured Ploshka. Only Boryna was seen by none; though they said he was there, too.

The Voyt was not in; he had that very afternoon driven over to head-quarters on official business; so they all assembled at Klemba's, followed by multitudes, women and children among them. But they made the door fast and let no one in. Voytek, the son of Klemba, had orders to watch the road and tavern, lest a gendarme should by chance show his face in the village. . . .

Round the cabin, filling the farm-yard, and even the road

beyond it, folk came in throngs together, all wondering what decision those elders of theirs would come to. They were taking counsel, and at great length—but with most secret deliberation. Only their hoary heads were visible through the windows, forming a semicircle around the glowing hearth; Klemba stood on one side, holding forth about . . . no one knew what: stooping now and then, and smiting at times on the table.

Those outside grew every minute more impatient; and at length Kobus and Kozlova, and more than one farm-labourer, began to murmur and talk openly against the men in counsel, saying that they would decide nothing of any good for the people; that they were men who cared only for themselves, and would readily come to terms with the manor, letting everybody else be ruined!

Kobus, along with the *Komorniki* and the poorer people, became so excited that he advised them outright to pay no attention to what the elders would decide, but think of themselves and take some energetic step before their rights had been sold.

Matthew then appeared, and proposed that they should go round to the tavern, where they might advise together in freedom—not like dogs barking outside other people's windows.

The idea pleased them, and all went together to the tavern.

The Jew had put out the lights, but they made him open the place again. He eyed in terror the crowd that poured in, though they were quiet enough, occupying every bench, table and corner of the big room, talking in groups, and waiting for someone to speak first to the meeting.

Plenty were willing; but they all held back, with looks of hesitation. And then Antek sprang forward in their midst, and furiously denounced the manor.

His words impressed them certainly, but they looked askance at the man, and eyed him with distrustful side-glances; some even turned their backs. The memory of the priest's words in church, and of Antek's wicked life, was too fresh in their minds.—But he cared nothing for that: he



was possessed by a spirit of recklessness and a savage lust of fighting; and he wound up by crying at the top of his voice:

"Boys, do not give in, do not be cravens, do not surrender your rights! To-day it is the forest they are wresting from you: fail to defend it, and to-morrow they will grab at your lands, at your homesteads, at all you have! Who will prevent them? Who will cry: 'Hands off?'"

His words struck home. A low growl went through the room; the crowd surged violently to and fro, with wild eyes flashing fire. A hundred fists were lifted up, and a hundred throats thundered forth: "We will! We will!" till the tavern-walls shook to the din.

It was this that the leaders were waiting for. At once Matthew, Kobus and Kozlova rushed forward, shrieking, cursing, and ruffling up the spirits of the men so, that the place was presently resounding with a confused noise of war-cries, imprecations, fists smiting the tables, and the fierce boisterous uproar of an angry mob.

Everyone shouted his opinion, everyone had his own plan that all must follow.

The tumult increased, and threatened to degenerate into brawling; for the men were growing quarrelsome, and wreaked their resentment for the wrong done them on those nearest at hand. Nor could they agree on anything to be done; for no one there had authority enough to put himself at their head and avenge them.

Little by little, they broke up into groups, with the loudest talker amongst them laying down his opinion.

"Why, they have hewn down half the forest—oak-trees of such a size that five men could not clasp them!"

"All this the son of Klemba has seen!"

"And they are going to cut down the rest, without asking your leave!" Koslova shrieked, pressing forward to the bar.

"The manor-folk have always oppressed us."

"Why not? Let them drive you, if you are silly enough sheep to allow them."

"We must not, we must not!—Let's all go out together, drive off the woodmen, and take back our forest!"

"And slay the oppressor!"

"Yea, let him be slain!"

Fists rose into the air with defiant gestures, a deafening shout was raised, and the whole multitude breathed hate and revenge. When the noise had subsided, Matthew, standing at the bar, cried to his friends:

"We, village folk, are pressed together as fish caught in a net: the manor-lands, stretching out on all sides, squeeze the life out of us.—Would ye send your cows to grass? Ye cannot for the manor-lands.—Would ye give your horses to eat? No, the manor-lands are there!—Ye cannot throw a stone but it falls on the manor-lands . . . and ye are taken to the court—sentenced—fined—imprisoned!"

"True! true it is!" a chorus of voices assented. "If there is anywhere a good meadow, giving an aftermath, it belongs to the manor; the very best fields are the manor's; and all the woods are theirs also."

"And we—the people—have barren sands to till, dried dung to burn in our stoves . . . and are waiters on Providence!"

"Take their woods, take their lands away from them! We will not give up what is ours!"

Thus they cried out for a long time, rolling to and fro in a waving mass, cursing and threatening furiously. All this was tiring to the throat and heated them, so several went to refresh themselves at the bar; and others, remembering that they had gone without supper, called to the Jew for bread and a herring.

Now when they had eaten and drunk, their excitement lessened greatly, and they began to withdraw, without having decided on any course of action.

Matthew, along with Kobus and Antek (who had stood apart all the time, lost in certain very dark thoughts of his own), then went over to Klemba's and, finding the man at home, arranged for something to be done on the morrow in concert with him: after which they retired.



It was dead of night, the lights were all out, and the village silent, with nothing to break the stillness but the rustling of the trees—of the frost-bedight trees, swaying, tossing and reeling, and striking each other, like foes in a battle. The cold was pretty severe, the hedges were clad in a pattern of lace; but far above, to the north, no stars were seen, and the sky was dark and sombre. So the night crept on, long, wearisome, filling everyone with misgivings and disquiet, with terrible dreams and nightmares, and fevered shadowy visions.

But as soon as ever it began to dawn, and men to raise their heavy slumberous heads, and open their dim eyes, Antek ran round to the belfry and tolled the alarm-bell.

Ambrose and the organist would have prevented him, but could not; he loaded them with curses, was near beating them, and went on ringing and swinging.

The bell tolled slowly, dolefully, dismally; terror fell on everyone; people on every side rushed out in dismay, half clad, and wondering what had befallen, stood outside their huts as if petrified. The day was breaking; the solemn and sonorous notes still continued to be heard, while the frightened birds winged their way to the forest, and the people, full of evil forebodings, crossed themselves and set their faces hard; for Matthew, Kobus and his mates were scouring the village, beating on the fences with their staves and crying:

"To the wood! To the wood! Come, all of you! The meeting is in front of the tavern.—To the wood!"

They dressed in the utmost haste, some buttoning themselves and saying their morning prayers on their way; and all were soon at the trysting-place, where stood Klemba and some other peasant-landowners.

The road, and the hedgerows, and all the yards and premises in the neighbourhood, were presently swarming with people. Children made a great noise, and women screamed in the orchards, and the confusion and tumult and uproar were such as a fire in the village might cause.

"To the wood!—Let every man set out with any weapon he has—scythe or flail or bar of wood or ax: 'tis all one!"

And the cry, "To the wood!" echoed all through the place.

By this time it was broad day—fair, bright and frosty, with a web of gossamer woven over the trees, and the frozen puddles in the roads crackling underfoot and breaking with a thin sound as of splintered glass. The bracing air smelt keen and sharp in the nostrils, and carried afar the noise of the tumult and shouting.

These, however, died away slowly, for everyone was prepared to act; a sense of grim, stubborn, relentless strength and assurance had hardened every mind with its harsh commanding power.

The crowd, increasing, had now filled all the open space between the tavern and the high road, and stood in serried ranks, shoulder to shoulder.

Each greeted his friends in silence; everyone stood where he could find place, looking about him patiently, or at the elders, who now arrived with Boryna.

This was the first man among them all; he was their only leader: without him, not one farmer would have moved an inch.

They stood there, still, attentive, like a forest of pine-trees, closely crowded, that listens to hear the voices within its own depths. Now and again a word was uttered, or a fist would shoot upwards; then their eyes would gleam, a wave of restlessness sweep over them, a face or two flush crimson; and then they once more stood motionless.

The blacksmith came in hot haste, trying to hold the people back, and deter them from their intent by the fear of results—ruin and chains for the whole village; and the miller spoke to the same effect. No one listened to them. Both were well known to be in the pay of the manor; opposition was their business.

Roch, too, came and besought them with unavailing tears. And, at last, the priest himself appeared, and began to speak to them. But even to him they paid no heed. They



stood unmoved; no one kissed his hand, no one even doffed his cap to him. Someone went so far as to cry aloud:

"Preaching is his livelihood!"

And another added, sneering:

"Our wrongs are not to be redressed with a sermon!"

So ominously luring were their faces that the priest burst into tears as he looked at them; yet he did not give up, but conjured them, by all they held most sacred, to return to their homes. It was useless; he was forced to be silent and go; for Boryna had come upon the scene, and they had eyes only for him.

Matthias was pale, stern and cold outwardly; but his eyes had the glint of a wolf's. He walked erect, sombre but decided, nodding to his acquaintances, and looking round upon the people. They made way for him, and he stepped on to the pile of logs in front of the tavern. But, before he spoke, voices in the crowd were raised:

"Lead us on, Matthias! lead us on!"

"On! on to the forest!"

When these cries had ceased, he bowed and, stretching forth his arms, spoke with a mighty voice:

"Ye Christian people, Poles, lovers of justice, whether husbandmen or *Komorniki*!—We have all been injured, and in such fashion as we can neither support nor forgive! The manor-folk are cutting down our forest . . . yes, those same manor-folk who will give no work to any man amongst us . . . those manor-folk who do all they can to harry us and drive us to ruin! Who can remember all the injuries and grievances and ill treatment our folk have suffered from them? We have appealed to justice: to what purpose? We have brought complaints: how have they been dealt with?—Well, the measure is filled: they are hewing down our forest. Men, shall we permit that too?"

"Never, never! Let us drive them off, let us slay them!" they answered him. Their faces were livid, but gleamed darkly, as a thunder-cloud with lightning-flashes: a hundred fists were shaken in the air, and a hundred indignant throats were clamorous.

"We have," Boryna went on to say, "we have our rights, and no one respects them: the forest is ours, and they cut it down! What, then, are we to do, we who are bereft of all help? For none in the world will do us justice. None!—Dear people, Christians, Poles, I tell you that there is now naught to be done save this one thing: defend by ourselves that which is our own property; go in a body, and forbid them to hew our forest down.—All! One and all! let us go, we, the inhabitants of Lipka—all save the cripples!—And, good friends, fear ye nothing: we have for us our rights, our will to assert them, and the justice of our cause. And, moreover, they cannot send a whole village to prison.—So come with me, men; be strong and courageous; come with me—to the forest!" he shouted in a voice of thunder.

"To the forest!" they all roared in reply. The crowd broke up, and every man ran home shouting. There was an interval of confused preparation, while they made ready: horses neighed, children screamed, men swore, women bewailed themselves; but in a very short time, all were on their way to the poplar road, where Boryna, in his sledge, was waiting, together with Ploshka, Klemba and the other foremost men in Lipka.

All fell into line as they came—peasant-owners, labourers, and even a few women and youngsters: some in sledges, some on horseback, some in carts; but the rest (nearly all the village) trudged on foot, forming a dense mass, like a long field of waving rustling corn, with the women's red garments for poppies, and, for the awns, bristling with good stout stakes and rusty pitchforks, with here and there a scythe, flashing brightly. The folk went out as if to reap—but not now with gay laughter and merry jokes. They stood silent, grim, relentless, ready for any encounter. And presently Boryna got into his sledge, eyed the people once more, and made the sign of the cross:

"In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen!"

"Amen, amen!" they repeated.—At that moment, they heard a tinkling bell, telling them that the priest had just



begun mass. They crossed themselves, took off their caps, smote their breasts, some of them uttering a pious sigh, as they marched on in regular formation, strong silent men—almost all Lipka. But the blacksmith had slunk away somewhere amongst the hedges, and, creeping back to his hut, leaped on to his horse to take a straight cut to the manor. As for Antek, who had, ever since his father appeared, withdrawn into the tavern, he procured a gun from Yankel, and as soon as the march began, hid it beneath his sheepskin, and made direct for the woods through the fields, without so much as casting a glance at the men of Lipka.

These were following Boryna as fast as they could: he drove foremost of all.

After him came the Ploshka families, who dwelt in three separate cabins, and Staho was their leader: a weakly-looking crew, but loud of tongue, and noisy, and self-assured.

Then all the Soha kinsmen, led on by Simon the Soltys.

The Vahnik tribe marched next—short thin fellows all of them, but fierce as hornets.

In the fourth line walked the Golombs, with Matthew at their head: few in number, but such stalwart men and plucky fighters, they were as good as half a village.

The Sikora family came next: thickset as tree-stumps, and sturdy men, but great grumblers.

Klemba's kin now advanced, and a host of striplings with them: tall young men, always fond of squabbles.—Over them was Gregory, brother to the Voyt.

And many another, too, brought up the rear, whose names were too many to mention.

Under their ponderous tread, the earth shook. The troop went forward, with dark and ominous faces; like a hail-cloud, bearing thunderbolts in its womb, showing a flash now and then, and, when it bursts, destroying all beneath it.

So they passed out; and then, how great was the lamentation of those left behind them at home!

. . . . .

The forest was standing, as yet torpid after the cold of the night, full of a drowsy stupor, and swathed in a mist of clotted opaqueness.

The woodland lay quiet, immersed in frost. The dawn reddened the tree-tops faintly, and fell here and there in streaks over the pallid snows below.

But, in Vilche Doly, there were heard, again and yet again, the thundering sound of falling trees, the clipping strokes of the axes, the harsh rough throbbing of the saws.

They were felling the forest!

Over forty men, hard at work, like a flock of woodpeckers, were assailing the trees, hacking at them with persistent fury. These fell, one after another, and the open space grew wider, as the fallen giants lay humbled to the ground, in longer and longer rows. Only in some places did a slender stripling, spared for seedlings, rise up in the midst of this desolation, as a tall thistle lifts its head over the lonely plain. But it seemed to stoop and mourn pitifully for its slain brothers.—The brushwood, too, that had been left untouched, and a few stunted trees which the ax had not deigned to sacrifice, also looked as though weeping over the dead. All round, upon the sheets of trampled snow, as if laid out to be wrapped in their shrouds, stiff and stark lay the murdered trees, and the heaps which had been their limbs, and the lopped crowns of the mighty trunks stripped of their boughs, like mangled mutilated corpses: while streams of yellow saw-dust—the blood of the slaughtered forest, as it were—were sinking into the snow.

In a circle about the cleared space, like men standing around an open grave, towered the thick unbroken forest, multitudinous and lofty, as friends and kinsmen might stand around, drooping, sorrowful, with muffled sighs, listening to the thudding falls, and gazing in dull bewilderment at this harvest reaped by inexorable Fate!

With never a pause, the wood-cutters went onward. Slowly, in one long line, they worked their way into the wood, which barred the way with its seemingly indestructible wall of close-set trunks. Its immensity swallowed them



up; they were lost in the shade of its branches; but their axes glittered through the gloom, and they hacked away tirelessly, and the stridulous uninterrupted rasping of the saws went on. Every now and then a tree would totter, and suddenly—like a bird caught in a snare—fall apart from its fellows and, tossing its arm wildly, crash down to the earth with a death-cry. And so another would fall, and a score, and scores upon scores!

There fell enormous pine-trees, green with the moss of age; and firs, arrayed in their dark verdure, and spruces with their many outspread arms; oak-trees, too, fell, with dry russet leaves still upon them, and overgrown with gray lichens as with beards—ancients of the forest that the thunderbolt would not blast, and the lapses of centuries had failed to crumble, now succumbed to the ax! And of other and meaner trees, who can say which and how many were laid low?

Groaning, the forest was slowly giving up its life as the trees fell: though these were like brave men in a battle, who, packed close and propped up one by another, fall little by little, giving way only to resistless might, and without a cry topple over into the jaws of death by whole ranks at a time.

Dull moans rose up; the earth vibrated continuously under the impact of felled trees; the axes went on smiting, the saws sawed without ceasing, while the whistling of the boughs, rushing athwart the air, pierced the ears like dying gasps.

So the work continued, hour after hour, with fresh booty won from the wood; the glade was all strewn with trunks, and the ax and saw were successful.

A few magpies perched and screamed upon the young trees spared for seedlings; a flock of crows would sometimes fly with harsh croaks over the field of death. Or else a roebuck would peer out from some thicket and, looking forth, gaze with bright eyes at the plumes of smoke wafted upwards from the fires in the clearing and at the down-

crashing trees; but when it saw men there, it fled with a bleating cry.

The men hewed and sawed, like wolves that have cornered a flock of sheep, which—huddled close, stupefied with fear, and bleating pitifully—await the moment when the throat of the last of them shall be torn out.

It was only after their breakfast, when the sun had risen so high that the hoar-frost began to melt, and a few shafts of golden light penetrated the woodlands—only then did a far-off hubbub come to their ears.

"There are people coming this way, and in numbers," someone said, putting his ear to a trunk.

The sound came nearer and nearer. Soon they could make out shouts and the dull trampling of many feet. About the space of an Ave Maria later, a sledge appeared on the way that led from the village. It entered the clearing at once. Boryna was standing up in it; and in his rear—on horseback, on foot, and in wagons—a great crowd of men, women and youngsters came dashing forward with a cry, to attack the wood-cutters.

Leaping down, Boryna ran forward at their head; all the others pressed close behind him, armed with their various weapons—brandishing pitchforks, flashing scythes, wielding flails with brawny arms. Some had only a branch to fight with, and the women less still—only their nails and their invectives!—And down they all swooped upon the affrighted wood-cutters.

"Away from the forest! 'Tis ours: ye shall not fell it!" they shouted all at the same time, and no man could make out what they wanted. But Boryna came up to the men, and called out in a voice like a trumpet:

"Men of Modlitsa, of Rzepki, and whencesoever ye come from: listen!"

There was a pause, and then he cried out:

"Take your belongings and tools, and go hence, and God be with you!—We forbid you to cut down our forest; and he that shall not obey will find us all ready to make him!"



No one opposed: the sight of that furious crowd, grim-visaged, with flails and pitchforks and scythes, overawed them. They cried to one another to give over, thrust their axes into their girdles, and pressed together—an angry muttering throng. The men of Rzepki especially, being of gentle blood, and having been besides for centuries at feud with their neighbours of Lipka, could not refrain from cursing aloud, shaking their axes, with promises of vengeance. But, however unwillingly, they yielded to superior force, while the Lipka folk followed them to the edge of the forest, threatening and shouting.

Others ran meantime about the clearing to put out the fires and throw down the piles of timber which had begun to rise; the women (Kozlova leading them), having seen at the edge of the clearing several boarded huts which had been set up, hastened to tear them down, and cast them about the woodland, that nothing of them might remain.

The woodmen having been so easily put to flight, Boryna called the farmers round him, urging them to come with him to the Squire and warn him against laying a finger on the forest until the law-courts should have decided what was to belong to the peasants. But ere they had settled what they should say, shrill screams were heard, and the women came fleeing away in great haste. Hard on a score of horsemen had entered on the scene, and were riding them down.

Notice had been given to the manor, which had accordingly at once dispatched these men to protect the woodcutters.

The steward was riding at the head of a lot of farm-servants. They made straight for the clearing and, falling upon the women whom they met first, set to horsewhipping them soundly. The steward, a burly wild-ox sort of man, rode first at them, shouting:

"Ah, the thieves, the lousy thieves! Thrash 'em! Bind 'em! To jail with 'em!"

"Rally, rally round me, boys! Stand up to them!"

roared Boryna. His men, panic-stricken, had begun to run; but at the sound of his voice they flew to his side, protecting their heads with their arms as they ran.

"Cudgel those sons of dogs, and keep your flails for the horses!" Boryna commanded, and, wild with fury, snatching up a stake at hand, rushed forward, striking hard and aiming well. And after him, like a wood shaken by some angry blast, the peasants charged on in close order, pitchforks and flails almost touching, and uttered a terrible cry as they dashed in amongst the manor servants; they smote and lunged boldly, and their flails rattled and clattered as handfuls of peas flung down on a wooden flooring.

A horrible uproar arose, with fearful oaths, and the whinnying of belaboured horses, and the groans of wounded men, and the hoarse noises of the struggling, and the battle-cries!

The manor people held out stoutly, with imprecations and blows as vigorous as those of the peasants; but at last they were forced back in confusion: under the strokes of the flails, the horses reared, squealing shrilly with pain, and fled with their riders. The steward, perceiving this, made his horse stand upright, broke into the mass of Boryna's men, and made for their leader. But this was his last effort: a score of flail-strokes were aimed at him, as many foes closed upon him instantly, and as many hands seized him, pulling him off his horse. Tossed like a bush that a spade has uprooted, he flew into the air, to come down on the snow at their feet, insensible. With difficulty Boryna protected him, and dragged him off into a place of safety.

All then became a whirling mass of men; the tumult was ear-splitting, and the eddying mingled throng so dense that nothing could be made out, save tangled groups of fighters, rolling in the snow—fists lifted and falling in passionate exasperation—and sometimes one or another would burst from the scrimmage and run madly away for a few yards—only to run back to the fight again, shouting and raging as before.



There were hand-to-hand fights, there were mass attacks; men were seized by the throat or by the hair of the head, and they tore at each other like wild beasts. Yet neither could get the upper hand. The manor servants, having alighted from their horses, gave ground no longer; the woodmen, besides, now came to their help with sturdy assistance: the men of Rzepki especially were foremost, rushing to their rescue in silence, like savage dogs that only bite. Moreover, the leader of them all was now the forester, who had but just arrived: a man of gigantic size, who dearly loved a fight, and had, besides, many a bone to pick with the Lipka folk. He darted onward, fighting alone against multitudes, cracking their skulls with the butt of his gun, and making them fly on every side: a scourge to them all, and a terror.

Staho Ploshka stood firm to stay his advance, for the people was already beginning to flee before him; but, seized by the throat, whirled in air, and dashed down like a sheaf of threshed corn, he remained unconscious on the ground.—One of the Vahniks then leaped forward and brought down his flail on the giant's shoulder with a smashing blow—only to get such a hit between the eyes that he called out, "Jesus!" and, opening his arms wide, fell stunned.

Now could Matthew bear it no longer, and came up to attack him. Yet, although in physical strength not inferior to Antek, he could not withstand the forester for a minute. This one was far the stronger, and beat him, and rolled him in the snow, and forced him to take to his heels: after which, he made for Boryna. But, ere he could reach him, he was assailed by a host of women, who flung themselves on him with shrieks, clawed his face, pulled out his hair by handfuls, and, piling themselves one upon the other, bore him to the earth along with them: like a lot of curs attacking a shepherd's dog, plunging their fangs in his flesh, and dragging him this way and that way.

Thenceforth did the Lipka folk begin to have the upper hand. Both parties were in close conflict, mingled like fallen

leaves; and each man chose his opponent, throttling and lugging him through the snow: while the women hung on the flanks of the battle, and tore at the enemies' hair.

And now the confusion was such that one could scarcely distinguish friend from foe. . . . In the end, the manor servants were beaten completely. Some lay bleeding; some, sorely bruised and exhausted, made off through the forest. Only the woodmen defended themselves to the uttermost; for certain amongst them had begged for mercy, which the people, still more exasperated against them than against those from the manor, and inflamed with anger as a resin-torch burning in a gale, were but little disposed to grant, and thrashed them most unmercifully.

Sticks and flails and pitchforks were now thrown aside, and they wrestled together, man to man, fist to fist, brute strength pitted against brute strength; crushing, tearing, wallowing on the ground! And there was no longer any noise of cries, but only low groans, curses, and the panting of the stubborn fight.

A tremendous day it was, a day of wrath.

The people seemed to have lost their heads, so greatly were they all infuriated by conflict. Kobus in particular, and Kozlova, looked like demented creatures, horrible to see, covered with blood and bruises, yet still attacking any number of enemies single-handed.

So the men of Lipka now set up a mighty cry, and rushed together to assault those who still resisted, one of them now putting to flight ten enemies, and following on the heels of those who fled.—Just then the forester, who had by now freed himself from the women's attack, but was very sore and all the more furious, shouted to rally his men. At the same instant, perceiving Boryna, he flew at him! Each grappled the other with a formidable hug, like two bears at odds, pushing, swaying, striking one another against the trees of the forest, at the verge of which they had arrived. . . .

It was then that Antek came up; he had been much



delayed on his way, though he had hurried so that he was forced to rest awhile to take breath, and also to see how things fared with his father.

The forester had the advantage. True, it was no easy matter, for he was much exhausted, and the old man fought a good fight. Again and again, both fell down, and rolled about like rival dogs, and bruised each other on the ground. But Boryna now was more and more frequently undermost; his cap had fallen off, and his white head was again and again battered against the gnarled roots of the trees.

Antek glanced round a second time, drew the gun from under his sheepskin, crouched down to take aim, and—crossing himself mechanically!—levelled the weapon at his father's head! But before he could pull the trigger, both combatants had risen to their feet, Antek rose likewise, and his barrel pointed straight at his father. . . . But no shot came.—A sense of unspeakable horror had entered his heart: he could hardly draw breath for the pain of it. His hands shook as with an ague; all his body trembled; a mist veiled his eyes. Then, suddenly, a short piercing shriek burst forth.

"Killed! I'm killed!"

The forester had just clubbed Boryna with his gunstock. The blood spurted; the old man threw up his arms and fell headlong to the ground.

Antek, flinging his gun away, sprang to his father's side, whose breath rattled in his throat. The skull was terribly injured; he still was alive, but his eyes stared glassily, and his feet moved with continuous jerks.

"My father! O Jesus! my father!" he exclaimed at the top of his voice. Taking up the insensible body, he pressed it to his bosom, and cried again, in tones of despair:

"My father! they have slain him . . . slain him!" And his voice was the howl of a wild beast that has lost her cubs.

Several men who were close by came to Boryna's aid, placed him upon a litter of boughs, applied snow to his wounded head, and assisted him to the best of their knowl-

edge. Antek had sat down on the ground, tearing his hair and crying out as one mad:

"They have killed him . . . killed him!" till the folk began to think him really distracted.

Suddenly he stopped.—All came upon him in a flash: he at once darted upon the forester with such a shriek of rage, with such a rabid glare in his eyes, that the latter trembled and would have fled. Soon aware, however, that flight could not save him, he turned and fired, so close that Antek's face was blackened with powder. By some miracle, he missed—and the avenger was on him like a thunderbolt.

Resistance, attempts to escape, prayers for mercy forced from him by despair and fear of death, were all in vain. Antek's clutch was the grip of a maddened wolf. He throttled him till the gristle of his windpipe cracked, then whirling him on high, thrashed a tree with his body until the breath was quite beaten out of it.

Then he began to fight the others. Wherever he appeared, all fled before him terrified: so fearful was he to behold, smeared with his father's blood and with his own, bare-headed, with matted hair, livid as a corpse—a portentous monster of superhuman strength! Almost by himself, he struck down and put to flight such as yet resisted; and, in the end, they were forced to calm him and hold him back, or he would have beaten all the hostile party to death.

All was over. Those of Lipka, though bleeding from many a wound, now filled the wood with triumphant cries.

The women tended the more grievously wounded, and placed them on sledges. They were not a few. One of Klemba's sons had a broken arm; Andrew Paches' leg, too, was broken; he could not walk, and screamed as they bore him off. Kobus was unable to move for the blows he had got; Matthew was spitting blood, and his loins hurt him exceedingly. Others also were in as evil plight almost. Scarcely one had come unscathed out of the encounter; but—they were victorious! So, caring no whit for their wounds, they set up joyful deafening shouts as they prepared to return.



Boryna was lifted into his sledge, and driven slowly, for fear he should die on the road. He remained unconscious: gore oozed from under the bandages, falling into his eyes and running down his cheeks, which were white as a dead man's.

Antek walked beside the sledge, gazing on his father with eyes full of dismay. When the ground was rough, he held his head up gently; from time to time he would murmur low, in a tone of infinite sorrow:

"My father! O God! my father!"

The folk went home as best they could, in disorderly groups of threes and fours, among the trees, for the road-way was taken up by the sledges. Now and then a deep groan was heard; but most of them laughed boisterously, with merry shouts. And they talked and talked, relating episodes of the fight, priding themselves on their victory, and deriding the vanquished. Songs, too, and deafening whoops reverberated through the woodland. They were all intoxicated with victory, and more than one staggered along, stumbling over roots or jostling the trunks of trees.

Blows and fatigue were all forgotten; their hearts, elated with the ineffable glory of success, swelled with enthusiasm, and felt the force to withstand the whole world, if it opposed. Nay! get the better of it, too!

On they trooped in noisy bands, with flashing glances at the forest—theirs by right of conquest!—And it waved above them and rustled and shed on their heads its dew of melted frost, as if it were weeping over them.

Suddenly Boryna opened his eyes, gazing long at Antek, and seemingly unable to believe his senses. Then a deep calm joy overspread his features; twice he opened his mouth to speak, and at last with a great effort succeeded in whispering:

"Is it you, son? is it you?"

And he relapsed into lethargy.

END OF PART II



## PART III SPRING

### CHAPTER I

SPRING had come.

Like a toiler who, having slept the sleep of exhaustion, is forced to rise ere dawn after a too short rest, and go out and plough without delay, the April morning was rising lazily.

It was grey dawn.

Silence reigned everywhere, save for the copious dews that dropped and dripped from the trees, wrapped in dense mists and slumbering.

Over the black earth, plunged in stillness and deep darkness, the sky was beginning to glimmer palely, and look like a sheet of wringing wet bluish canvas.

All the low-lying meadows were whitish with mantling haze, which resembled the frothy head of milk in a pail.

Cocks presently vied with one another, crowing in the yet invisible hamlets.

The last stars went out, closing their tired and sleepy eyes.

And now a glow was kindled in the East, as when they blow on embers half quenched in the ashes.

The floating mists rolled heavily hither and thither, surged about the dusky fields as floods in the spring thaw, or went up the sky in thin blue spirals, like incense smoke.

The day was at odds with the paling night, which crouched and clung close to the earth, covering it with its thick wet cloak.

The light was slowly spreading all over the sky, and coming down nearer and nearer to the ground, and struggling with the entangling fog. In places, along the uplands, there were seen drab dew-soaked expanses, peering out of the night,



and splashes of water that shimmered with lack-lustre surfaces, and brooks that poured their streaming contents along, between the dissolving mists and the brightening dawn.

And as it grew lighter, the flush in the East changed from livid violet to the blood-red tints of a huge conflagration. Things grew visible: the black circle of forest at the sky-line, the long row of poplars on the ascending road, drooping forward, as though tired by the weary climb, sprang into sight; and the hamlets sprinkled over the country-side, and hitherto buried in shadows, now peeped forth here and there in the morning light, like dark rocks in a swirl of foaming water, and some of the nearer trees were silvered all over with morning dew.

The sun had not risen yet, but it was clearly on the point of bursting out of the crimson glory round it, upon the world now just opening its bleared eyes, and stirring a little, but still resting and drowsily enjoying its rest. Now the stillness seemed to ring yet more loudly in the ears, for the earth was, as it were, holding its breath: only a feeble breeze, faint as the breathing of an infant, blew from the woods and shook the dew-drops from the trees.

Out of the greyness of the early morn, above those fields still deep in slumber and in shadow, like a church filled with silent worshippers, suddenly rose the ditty of a lark.

Up from the ground it soared, and, rising, flapped its wings, twittering with silvery sounds—the tinkling of a Mass-bell, as it were—or like a fragrant column of springtide perfumes, rising, rising upward; and from the hallowed heights and silences of the eastern sky it called aloud to all the country-side.

And in a little others joined its song, soaring to heaven, and, as they beat their wings, proclaimed the approach of day to every creature!

The sun was coming, it was close at hand.

At last it peered above the far-off forest, as if it rose from an abyss; as if divine invisible hands were holding up its huge and glittering paten over the drowsy lands, and blessing with the blessing of its light all things that in them were

—living or dead, coming to life or dying out of it—beginning thus the holy offering of the day, while all things fell and worshipped in the dust, mutely closing their unworthy eyes before its sacred majesty.

Now day had dawned.

Like odoriferous smoke, the haze was wafted upwards from the meadows to the gold-splashed sky; and birds and living things of every kind burst out into a chant . . . a cry, a thankful prayer, a prayer rising from the heart!

Then did the sun appear above the dark woods and countless villages, high, mighty, shedding warmth below—the eye of God's own mercy—and commence its reign, its peaceful gentle mastery over all the land.

It was just then that Agata, the Klembas' aged kinswoman, made her appearance upon a sandhill near the forest, where several stacks belonging to the Manor stood by a roadway full of deep ruts.

In early autumn she had started on her pilgrimage of beggary, and eaten "bread of our Lord's giving" ever since.

And now she had come back, just like those homing birds that always find their nests again in spring.

Old, feeble, very short of breath, and something like a roadside willow, rooted in the sand, decrepit, phosphorescent, tottering to its fall—she walked all in rags, staff in hand, wallet on back, and a rosary dangling at her side.

The sun was rising when she passed the Manor stacks with quick short steps, raising her weatherbeaten shrivelled face to the sun, while her grey eyes, though bloodshot, sparkled bright with joy.

Ah! Back again in her native village, after the long hard winter!—The thought gave wings to her feet; her wallet jogged upon her shoulders, and her beads tinkled at her side: but soon her breath grew short, her labouring lungs failed her, and she had perforce to stop and then go on more slowly and painfully. But her hungry eyes scoured the country round; she smiled on those grey fields, now greenish with a haze of growing corn; on the villages, coming little by little out of the enveloping fog; on those trees, as yet bare of



foliage, that stood as guardians of the road, and on those others, scattered solitary about the plain.

By this time the sun was pretty high, and cast its beams over the farthest fields of all. The whole country gleamed with rosy dew; the black ploughed lands shone in light, the waters glittered, streaming by in the ditches, the voices of the larks rang loud through the cool air. Farther, beneath some outjutting crags, the last patches of vanishing snow still glistened. On a few trees there hung clusters of yellow catkins that dangled in air like amber beads. In certain nooks, and from the beds of pools drying in the sun, young grass with golden blades was springing up amongst last year's dry rust-coloured leaves, or wild flowers were opening their yellow eyes. A light breeze had caught up the rich dank odours of the plain that basked idly in the sunlight; and everything around was so bright, so vast, and full of such delicious sweetness that Agata would fain have had wings, to soar upwards with a great cry of joy and rapture.

"O good Lord! O dear Jesus!" she gasped, sitting down to take the whole view, as it were, into her tender heart that throbbed with gladness.

Oh, how the springtide was rolling on over the broad plains, while the lark's anthems announced its coming to all! . . . And that sacred sun! . . . And oh, the soft warm caresses of the wind, like the kisses of a mother! . . . and the still, mysterious yearnings of the land, awaiting the plough and the sower! . . . Oh, and the seething of life everywhere coming forth, and the breezes pregnant with that which was soon to be the blade—the flower—the full corn in the ear!

Oh, how the spring was coming forth, like a bright lady clad in sunbeams, with a face like the rosy dawn, and tresses like streaming waters! Here she was, floating down from the sun, and hovering over the cornfields this bright April morning; and from her outspread hands fluttered many a lark, set free to sing her praises blithely! In her wake flew

rows of cranes, with joyful clangorous notes, and wild geese, in wedge-shaped formation athwart the pale-blue sky. Storks went forth along the marshy levels, swallows twittered by the huts, and all the winged tribes came singing merrily. And as often as that sunny mantle of hers touched the earth, grasses sprang up, quivering to the breeze; swollen buds glistened under their coating of viscid gum, and leaflets whispered low; for a new strong lush life was rising everywhere.

And oh, how she caressed and fondled all those poor lowly tumble-down cottages! With what eyes of mercy did she glance beneath the thatches, and awake to life the chilled and palsy-stricken hearts of men, who now—in this hour of longed-for consolation—put aside their griefs and sombre broodings, and dreamed that a happier lot might yet be theirs!

The land resounded with life, as a bell long silent, when given a new tongue. It was the sun's gift, and the magnificent peal rang out and boomed with clamorous joy, waking timid hearts and singing of things most marvellous, until it found an echo in every soul. Tears started to every eye: the immortal spirit of man, rising up in its strength, knelt in raptures to embrace the land—that world of its own—aye, every swollen and pregnant clod of it!—every tree and stone and exhalation—all that he cherished and held dear!

Thus felt Agata, as she dragged herself slowly along, greedily gloating over that Holy Land of her dreams, and reeling at times as if from strong drink.

The Mass-bell, tinkling in the steeple, recalled her to her senses at last, and she fell upon her knees.

"... Thy holy will, O Lord, has brought me home.

"... Thou hast shown mercy to the friendless one!"

She could hardly get the words out. A great torrent of tears welled up from her heart and poured down her withered cheeks. So moved was she that she could no longer find her beads, nor any but incoherent utterances, struck out from her soul like burning sparks. At last, with a mighty effort,



she rose and went forward, her eyes on the country-side around her.

It was now broad day. All Lipka was spread out before and beneath her, in a circle round the mill-pond, now dark-blue and glittering like a mirror through the thin veil of whitish haze over it. Along its shores the cottages were crouching on the ground, and seated like goodwives amongst their yet leafless orchard-trees. A little smoke rose above some of the thatches, panes gleamed in the sunshine, and freshly whitewashed walls contrasted strongly with the dark trunks that partly hid them.

And now she could make out each of the huts apart. The mill, with its noisy clutter more distinct as she advanced, stood at one end of the village, close to the road she was following, and at the opposite end the church raised its high white front amongst huge trees, its windows and the golden cross on the steeple shining afar, and the red-tiled roof of the priest's house visible close by. And beyond, to the very sky-line, extended the bluish-grey ring of forest, the wide expanse of cornland, villages at a distance, nestling in their orchards; outjutting crags, winding roadways, lines of slanting trees, sandhills scantily clad with juniper-bushes, and the thin thread of the stream, sparkling as it ran on to the mill-pond, in and out among the huts.

Nearer to her lay the ground belonging to Lipka—as it were, long strips of canvas or cloth that variegated the sloping uplands. They ran in sinuous bands, one close to the other, separated only by the winding footpaths between them, thickly planted with spreading pear-trees, and overrun with briars and brambles; or by drab fallows, clear-cut and sharp in the yellow morning light. Patches of land sown in autumn, now beginning to turn green, dark-hued potato-fields of last year's crop, bits of newly ploughed soil, and waters on the low levels, with a greyish glimmer as of molten glass, completed the picture. Beyond the mill stretched peaty-coloured meadows, on which storks were seen to wade and heard to "klek"; and farther, cabbage plantations, so flooded

as yet that only the tops of the furrows emerged from the water like stranded fishes: over these, white-bellied lapwings flew about. At the crossways there stood crucifixes or statues of saints. And above this little world, the hollow wherein the village nestled, hung the hot bright sun, and the lark trilled out its song: a plaintive lowing was heard from the cow-byres; geese screamed; human voices called one to another; while the wind, bearing all these sounds upon its wings, blew with so warm and so gentle a breath that the land seemed plunged in that quiet ecstasy in which new life is conceived.

Yet there were not many workers to be seen in the fields. Only a few women, close to the village, were scattering dung about, and stray whiffs of its sharp pungent smell came to her nostrils.

"The lazy fellows! What can they be about on such a day as this, when the land is simply begging to be tilled? . . . Why are so few at work?" she muttered, in no good humour.

To approach the fields yet nearer, she left the road for a narrow path that crossed a ditch where the grass grew lush, and plenty of daisies already opened their pink eyelashes to the sun. She well remembered how, in former years, the fields were at that season all dotted over with red petticoats, and echoing to the lasses' songs and cries; and she knew well that in such weather it was just the time to manure and till and sow the land. What, then, could the matter be? Why, she saw only one single peasant, standing somewhere in the fields and walking along, throwing grain broadcast in a semicircular sweep.

"He must be sowing peas, so early in spring. . . . One of Dominikova's lads, no doubt," she said, and added, with all her heart: "May God in His mercy grant you a bountiful harvest, O dear sower!"

The path was rugged and uneven, full of fresh molehills and many a puddle. But, absorbed as she was in every bit of land she saw, she paid no heed to these.



"This is the priest's rye-field. How well it grows! I remember, when I started on my wanderings, the farm-servant was ploughing here, and his Reverence sat close by."

Again she crawled on painfully, breathing hard and looking round with tearful eyes.

"This is Ploshka's rye . . . but it must have come up late, or rotted somewhat in the ground."

She bent down—no easy task for her!—to stroke the moist blades lovingly, as she would have stroked a child's head, with tremulous withered fingers.

"Ah, here is Boryna's wheat! A magnificent piece of ground. Of course: is he not the first farmer in Lipka?—A little frostbitten, though; the winter has been very severe," she thought, looking out over the flat expanse of fields ploughed last autumn, and the blades sunk deep in the earth and soiled with mire, testifying to the heavy winter snows and floods.

"Oh," she sighed, "the folk here have suffered not a little." And she shaded her eyes to look at a couple of lads who were coming by from the village.

"The organist's pupil, and one of his sons. . . . What large baskets! Ah, no doubt they are going to Vola with their annual list for confession. Yes, that is what they are about."

She greeted them as they went by, and would have chatted with them willingly; but they only mumbled a reply, and hurried on, deep in conversation with each other.

"And I have known them ever since they could walk!" she said, disappointed and out of sorts. "Ah, well! how should they know a beggar like me?—But Michael has grown up finely, and will surely now be playing the organ for his Reverence."

She was presently close to Klemba's property. "Lord! there is not one man to be seen!" she cried.—She was now so near the village that she could smell the smoke of the chimneys, and see the beds and cushions laid out to air in the orchard. Her heart was brimming over with thankfulness for having been spared till now, and allowed to come back

to her people. In this hope she had been able to live through the winter: it had upheld and strengthened her against cold and want and death itself.

She sat down under some bushes, to arrange her dress a little, but could not. Joy made her limbs quiver and her heart flutter like a strangled bird.

"There are still some good kind people here," she whispered, looking hard at her wallet. She had put by, she knew, quite enough for her burial.

For many a year she had set her heart upon one thing: to die (when our Lord should call her) in her own village, lying in a cottage, on a feather-bed, and beneath a row of holy images upon the wall: as all goodwives die. And for many a year she had been saving against that last, that sacred hour!

Now at the Klembas', up in the loft, she had a chest, and within that chest a great feather-bed, with sheets and pillows, and new pillow-covers: all clean, and none of them ever used, in order to be always in readiness. There was no other place to put that bedding, for she never had a room or a bedstead to herself, but was used to sleep in some corner, on a litter of straw, or in the cow-house, according to circumstances, and as the people of the house allowed her. For she would never assert herself, nor make any complaints, being well aware that things take place in this world according to God's will, and are not to be changed by sinful man.

And yet—in secret, silently, and asking to be forgiven for her pride—she had dreamed of this one thing: to be buried like a village goodwife. For this she had long prayed in fear and trembling.

Naturally, therefore, on arriving in the village, and aware that her last hour was not far off, she set about considering whether there was anything that she had forgotten.

No. She had got all that was required. With her she carried a Candlemas taper that she had begged after a night-watch over a dead body; a bottle of holy water; a new sprinkling-brush, a consecrated picture of Our Lady of Chénstohova, which she should hold when dying, and a few score



*zloty* for her burial, which might possibly also suffice for a Mass to be said, before the body, with candles and the rite of sprinkling performed at the church-door. For she never dreamed that the priest would accompany the body to the grave.

*That* was out of the question. Not every landowner had the luck of being honoured thus; besides, the fee for that alone would swallow up all her savings!

She sighed heavily and rose to her feet, feeling much weaker than usual. Her lungs hurt her greatly, and she was so racked with coughing that she could hardly crawl along.

"If," she mused, "I was able to hold out till hay-making, or till the harvest begins! Oh, then I could willingly lie down and die, dear Jesus! lie down and die!"

She thought her hopes sinful, and wanted to excuse them.

But now arose the disquieting thought: who would take her in and let her die in his hut?

"I shall," she said, "look for some good kind-hearted people: and they may be more willing if I promise them a little money. Indeed, no one cares to have trouble and annoyance in his own cottage on account of a stranger."

As to dying at her relations', the Klembas, she durst not even think of that.

"So many children!—No room in the cabin; and the fowls are laying now, and place must be made for them.—And then, it were a disgrace for such landowners to have a beggar, their kinswoman, die under their roof."

All this she was pondering without any bitterness, as she plodded her way on the road along the dike raised to protect the meadows and cabbage-plantations from a flood.

The mill-pond shone bright on her left, reflecting the sun's golden locks in its deep-blue waters. On its banks, overgrown with drooping alders, flocks of geese screamed and flapped their wings; on the still miry roads, troops of merry children ran about and shouted.

And Lipka stood on this side and on that of the pond, as it had stood no doubt ever since the world began, buried

in its wide-spreading orchards, and in the undergrowths of its enclosures.

Slowly Agata trudged on, but with swift glances that took everything in at once. The miller's wife was sitting on the threshold of her house, amongst a boisterous troop of goslings, yellow as wax, that she was taking care of. Agata greeted her, and went quickly past, well pleased that the dogs which lay basking along the walls had not taken note of her.

She crossed the bridge, where the waters began their rush to the mill-wheels, and the road forked out into two branches that embraced the whole village.

After an instant's hesitation, her desire to see everything mastered her, and she turned to the left, making her way a little longer.

The forge, which she passed first, was silent and lifeless; against the sooty walls stood the fore part of a cart and several rusty ploughs: but the smith himself was away, and his wife, in smock and petticoat, busy digging in the orchard.

Agata went around, stopping before every hut, leaning over the low stone fences, and gazing curiously at all she saw within. Dogs came up and sniffed at her, but seemed to recognize one of the inhabitants, and went back to lie in the sun.

Wherever she went, she found a strange stillness and emptiness.

"All the men are away . . . attending either at some law court or a meeting somewhere," she finally said to herself, as she entered the church.

Mass was over; his Reverence sat in the confessional; some dozen or so of people from distant hamlets were in the pews, at intervals heaving deep sighs, or uttering some words of their prayers aloud.

From a lamp suspended in front of the high altar, a ripple as of bluish smoke ascended tremulously through the sunlight that poured down from the windows high above. Without, sparrows chirruped, and now and then ventured into the aisles with straws in their beaks; from time to time



a swallow came twittering in by the great doorway, swept round, skirting the cold silent walls, and speedily flew back to the bright world outside.

Agata said a few short prayers and hurried out, eager to get to the Klembas'. Just in front of the church, Yagustynka met her.

"What, you here, Agata!" she exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes, here I am, and still alive, good dame"; and she bent to kiss her hand.

"Why, they said ye had turned up your toes somewhere far away. But I see that 'our Lord's bread,' though easily earned, has not done you much good. There's a churchyard look about you," the old hag said, eyeing her mockingly.

"Ye say true, good dame; I have scarce been able to drag my old bones hither."

"Off to the Klembas', eh?"

"Surely. Are they not my kith and kin?"

"Your wallet is pretty well filled: they will receive you kindly. Also ye have there, I dare say, a few coins knotted in a clout. Aye, aye! they will certainly admit your kinship."

"Are they all well?" Agata interrupted, pained at her jeers.

"They are. Except Thomas, who is in poor health, but getting better in prison."

"Thomas! In prison?—Pray make no such jokes; they do not amuse me."

"What I said I repeat. But let me add that he is in good company; the whole village is there too along with him. When the law comes in, with its trap-doors and gratings, it takes no account if a man has land or not."

Agata stood bewildered. "Jesus, Mary, Joseph!" she moaned.

"Now hurry along to Klemba's wife: you will soon be fed up with news. . . . Aha! the men are taking a holiday, with a vengeance!" she said, and laughed maliciously.

Agata crept away: she could not believe the news. On

her way, she saw several women whom she knew, and who greeted her kindly; but she made as though she had not heard them, and of set purpose went as slowly as she could, putting off the dread confirmation of what the old woman had told her. She lingered long, gazing here and there, unwilling to know the worst.

At last, however, she made bold to enter Klemba's hut, which was at hand; but she trembled all over, and looked with frightened eyes at the orchard and the cottage in the background. Close to the windows, the cows were drinking noisily out of a large tub; and on the other end of the long open passage through the hut, she could see a sow with her little ones wallowing in the mud, and fowls looking eagerly for food on the dunghill. The tub was empty now. Taking it up (for she somehow felt more courage, coming in thus with something in her hand), she entered the large dusky room, and "praised God."

"Who is that?" answered a plaintive voice from the inner chamber.

"'Tis I—Agata." With what a catch in her voice did she utter the words!

"Agata! Well, I never . . . !" said Dame Klemba, appearing suddenly on the threshold, with her apron full of little goslings, while their mothers came hissing and gagging round her.

"Ah! God be thanked! And folk said ye had died so long ago as last Yule-tide; only no one knew where, and my goodman even went to the police office to find out.—Take a seat: ye must be tired.—You see, our geese have been hatching."

"A goodly brood! What a number, too!"

"Yes: threescore less five.—Come out in front of the house; I must feed them and take care lest the old ones trample them down."

She let them escape from her apron, and they began to run about, fluffy like yellow catkins; while the mother birds came up, gagging with pleasure, and stretching out their long necks over them.



Dame Klemba brought them a mixture of minced eggs, nettle-leaves, and groats, set out on a board, and squatted down to protect them; for the parents, with loud indignant screams, tried hard to get at the food, and tread the little ones down and peck at them.

Agata sat down in front of the house. "They are all marked with grey between the wings," she said.

"'Tis the mark of their breed: very large-sized. I got the eggs from the organist's wife: one in exchange for every three of mine.—Ah, 'tis well you have come; there's so much work, one does not know what to do first."

"I will bestir myself at once—at once!"

She made an effort to rise, meaning to set about doing something or other; but her strength failed her, and she reeled against the wall.

"Evidently," the other said, noting her livid face, and her strangely swollen and discomposed appearance, "evidently ye are too much used up to be of service any more."

She was vexed to see her like this; it was clear to her that the woman would not only be useless, but cause no little trouble besides.

Agata must have guessed what she felt, and said in a timid apologetic tone:

"Do not fear: I will not cumber you, nor intrude on your meals. I shall but rest awhile, and then go away. I merely wanted to see you all, and ask about you." Her eyes brimmed with tears.

"Well, but I am not turning you out.—Sit down; you will only leave us if you choose."

"Where are the lads?" she asked presently. "In the fields with Thomas, I suppose?"

"Have ye not heard, then, that they are all in jail?"

Agata joined her hands in silent agony.

"Yagustynka had told me as much, but I could not believe it."

"Ah! she told you the truth—gospel truth!"

She drew herself up stiffly and wept, as she remembered what had happened.

"Aye, it was as a very Doomsday for Lipka. They were taken away to town, all of them—all!—How I outlived it, I cannot tell. . . . 'Twas three weeks ago now, and it is as fresh in my mind as a thing of yesterday. Only Maciek, and the girls who are in the fields spreading dung, and I, poor wretched creature, have been left!

"Get away!" she suddenly cried to the geese. "Would ye then kill your own children as swine do? Would ye?"

And she called together the goslings, which were all going off into the enclosure after the mother birds.

"Nay, let them run about," said Agata; "no hawk is in sight, and I will look after them."

"Ye can scarce drag your limbs: how should you run after geese?"

"Ever since I crossed your threshold, I have felt better."

"Then try.—I will get you some food. Shall I boil milk for you?"

"Thanks, mistress, but on Saturdays in Lent I never take milk. Give me a pot of boiling water. I have bread with me, and shall crumble it in and eat."

In a little, Dame Klemba brought her a dish of hot water, seasoned with salt, and Agata took her meal of crumbled bread. Meanwhile the former told her all about the battle, its causes, and its end. How Boryna's skull had been cracked by the keeper, whom Antek slew in his turn to avenge his father; how the old man had been lying insensible ever since; how others too had been badly hurt in the fight, and how little they cared for that, because they won the victory.

"But," she went on to say, "on the following Sunday, not four days after, when wet snow was falling thick, and one could hardly step out of doors, we were preparing to go to church, when the Gulbas lads came round, shouting: 'The gendarmes are here!'

"So indeed they were—thirty of them, besides officials and justices . . . a whole court!—and they quartered themselves upon the priest. Then they set about putting questions and taking notes, and bringing everybody to them



under guard for examination. No one resisted; they all spoke out bravely, telling the truth as frankly as at Holy Confession.—This ended about eventide. The court was for carrying the whole village away, even the women! But there was such a crying and wailing of children that the men began to look about them for staves, and would have fought to the uttermost. . . . Then his Reverence must have spoken to the justices, for they left us here. Not even Kozlova did they take, though she used most evil speech to them: only the men were put in jail. And as to Antek, son of Boryna, they ordered him to be conveyed thither in bonds."

"In bonds! O Lord!"

"They bound him, but he snapped the ropes asunder like tow. And all were afraid of him, who seemed as though mad with fever, or possessed with a devil. And he stood up before them, and looked them in the face, saying:

"'Make my hands and feet fast with manacles and fetters, and watch over me well.—Else I slay you all, and do to myself an evil thing!'

"He was so amazed for his father's loss that he himself offered his hands and feet to the gyves. And thus did they carry him away.

"Never shall I forget how they took him: never, till I die. And my goodman did they take likewise, and my sons, and the other men: about threescore of them.

"But what fell out here at that hour—what lamentations, what awful curses were heard—I could in no wise tell you!

"And now spring is here; the snows have melted away, the fields are dry and crying out to be tilled, and the time for ploughing and sowing has come: but we have no one to work here!

"Only the Voyt, the smith, and a few decrepit old men have been left; of the young men, only the fool, Yasyek Topsy-turvy!

"Yet 'tis now the season for yeaning and calving; and of our women, many are brought to bed in these days; and we must think of our lads over there, and take food to them,

with a little money and a clean shirt or two; meanwhile, we are over head and ears in work, and there is no hiring labour elsewhere, every peasant having first of all to shift for himself."

"Will they not be soon set free?"

"The Lord knows! Our priest went to the police; so did the Voyt: and they say that, the inquiry over, sentence will be given. But three weeks have gone by, and not one man is back home. Roch, too, went to make inquiries last Thursday."

"Does Boryna live still?"

"He does, but even as one dead; he lies like a log, insensible. Hanka sent for the best doctors, but they did naught."

"What could they do? Physicians are in vain when the ailment is mortal."

Klembova then told her visitor all that had taken place in winter; for Agata had not heard anything.

She let her arms drop in sheer amazement and horror at what she now learned: the news made her heart ache.

"O my God! I was all the time thinking of Lipka, but never, never dreamed . . . All my life I have heard nothing like it.—Is Satan come to abide with us?"

"Belike he is."

"It must be so. Our Lord is punishing us for the grievous sin of Antek with his stepmother. But there are other sins besides, that now spring forth and are seen by all."

Agata feared to ask what these were; she raised a shaking hand and, crossing herself, mumbled some devout prayer.

"Yes, all the people have to suffer for them. While Boryna is lying there for dead"—here she lowered her voice—"they say that Yagna is making up in real earnest to the Voyt. Antek is away, Matthew also: she has no young fellow by, so she takes the first willing man she meets! What a world we live in, my God!" she ejaculated, wringing her hands.

Agata had nothing to reply. The news she had heard depressed her so, that her former fatigue now came upon her



with increased power, and she crept to the byre to get some rest.

About sunset she was seen again, going the round of her acquaintances; and when she came back to the Klembas', these were at supper.

A spoon had been set and a place reserved for her; not a first place, of course. But she had little appetite, and preferred telling them what she had seen in the towns she had visited as a pilgrim.

Then night fell and they lit a candle in the room previous to retiring for the night, she brought out her wallet, and, while they surrounded her with breathless curiosity, slowly took forth the various things she had bought for them: for each one, a holy picture; for the girls, a necklace (ah, how they, one after another, went peeping into the looking-glass, to see how theirs became them, drawing up their necks, like so many turkeys!); good strong knives for the lads; for Thomas, a large packet of tobacco, and for his good dame, a great frill, deeply scalloped and adorned with many-coloured embroidery, all so beautiful that the housewife herself clapped her hands to see it!

All were extremely pleased, all feasted their eyes upon the gifts; while Agata, enjoying their pleasure, told them in detail how much each article had cost and where it had been bought.

They sat up long, talking of the absent ones.

"The village is so deadly still, it makes me feel a lump in the throat!" Agata said at last, when all had done talking, and there was a deep dull silence around her. "How different it was this time last year! The whole village shook with shouts and laughter."

"Yes, and now it looks like a vast grave," Klembova chimed in mournfully; "only fit to be covered with a tombstone, and have a cross raised above."

"So 'tis.—Mistress, may I go and rest upstairs?" Agata asked meekly. "My bones ache with journeying, and my eyes begin to draw straws."

"Sleep wheresoever ye choose: there is no lack of room now!"

But as she was going up the ladder to the loft, Klembova spoke to her through the open door:

"Oh, I had all but forgotten to tell you. . . . We have taken your feather-bed out of your chest. . . . During the Carnival, Marcyha was down with the smallpox . . . and it was very cold . . . and we had nothing to keep her warm with.—So we borrowed it of you. . . . It has been aired by now, and shall be taken upstairs to-morrow."

"My feather-bed?—Well, 'twas your wish. . . . All right, since ye wanted it."

She broke off, unable to say more, and groped her way up to the chest. Raising the lid, she ran her hands feverishly over her funeral outfit.

Yes, the feather-bed that she had left completely new had been taken! New, not even once used! . . . How she had picked up the stuffing, feather by feather, gleaning them upon the goose-pastures, to have her last bed ready for her! She burst out crying: the blow was too cruel.

And she prayed for a long time, seasoning her prayers with bitter tears, and lovingly complaining to her dear Jesus of the wrong done to her.



## CHAPTER II

THE next day was Palm Sunday.

Bright and early, Hanka rose, putting on only her petticoat, and throwing a shawl on her shoulders, for the cold.

Round she looked everywhere, even to the boundaries of the enclosure and over on to the road. It was quite empty and void of life: only the dry light of dawn clad the leafless tree-tops along its line.

Returning to the porch, and kneeling down with difficulty (for she expected to be confined in a week or so), she began her morning prayer, with drowsy eyes wandering over the landscape.

The day, laden with white fire, was coming apace, and the ruddy glow of dawn melting away into a golden expanse in the East, like the rich silk canopy over the Monstrance, when the Monstrance is not yet in sight.

There had been a slight frost overnight; hedges, roofs, cottages shone with white radiance, and the trees had the air of so many fleecy clouds.

The village was still sleeping in the haze that crept along the ground; but a few cabins nearer the road now began to show their snowy walls. The mill went on uninterruptedly; the river babbled and bubbled low, audible but unseen.

Cocks were noisy and many birds chirped in the orchards, as if saying their morning prayers together, when Hanka went out again to look over all the place and wake the sleepers.

She first opened the half-door to the sty. A large porker struggled to get up, but was so fat, it rolled back upon its substantial hind quarters, and only turned its snout towards

her, grunting, as she inspected the trough and put in some fresh food.

"Its hams are so clad with fat, it can hardly rise. Truly, the fat is at least four inches thick!" And she felt its sides with delight.

Entering the poultry-house, she then, to attract the fowls, threw some of the pig's food she had brought with her. Down they came in a hurry from their roosting-place, with the cocks crowing lustily.

She drove away the ganders, which attacked them, and carefully examined the eggs, one by one, holding them up to the light.

"They will be hatched out in an hour!" she said, for she could just make out a faint pecking sound within.

Just then Lapa, indifferent to the ganders hissing round him, came out of his kennel, drowsily and yawning audibly.

At her sight, with a bark and a wag of his tail, he came to her through the crowd of hens; the feathers flew about. He leaped up at her, put his paws on her breast, and licked her hands, she patting his head the while.

"Ah, this dumb creature has more feeling than many a man! . . . Now, Pete! Time to rise!" she cried, beating on the stable-door, until she heard a grumbling and the sound of a bolt shot back; thereupon she opened the cow-byre door, where the kine were lying in a row before their mangers.

"What, Vitek! Sleeping so hard, and so late? Up, young imp!"

The boy awoke, rose from his straw bed, and began to draw his breeches on, though murmuring; for he was afraid of her.

"Give the kine some hay to eat, before I milk them; and then come at once and peel potatoes. But not a handful to Lysula, look you!" she added sternly: Lysula was Yagna's property. "Let her mistress feed her!"

"Oh, she does; and so well that the poor beast is bellowing for food, and eats the straw that's under her!"

"She may starve, for aught I care: 'tis no loss of mine!" she said, with fierce animosity.



Vitek muttered some words and, when she had gone, fell back on his pallet, to doze for a few seconds more.

In the barn, upon the straw-strewn threshing-floor, lay the potatoes chosen for planting. She looked in there, and also into the shed close by, where all their farming-implements were stored. Then, having seen, as she did regularly each day, that nothing was missing or had been damaged during the night, she went out into the wheat-fields, where she continued her interrupted morning prayers.

Now that the sun had risen, there was as a blast of flame rushing through the orchard. The dews were dropping from the trees, the wind rustled softly in the boughs, the larks trilled forth their carols louder and louder. Folk began to move about, the waters of the mill-pond beat upon the banks, gates opened with a rusty creak, geese screamed, dogs yelped, and now and then a human voice was heard.

Folk were rising later than their wont. It was Sunday, and they were glad to rest their tired limbs a little longer.

Hanka prayed only with her lips: her thoughts were elsewhere. . . .

She gazed over those broad lands, bounded afar by the thick veil of the forest, which the flames of the eastern sky were flooding, making the young fir-trees stand out like amber amidst the bluish underwood; over those other fields, shimmering tremulously in the quivering yellow glare, and growing their moist greenish fleece of sprouting corn; over the thin watery streaks—threads of silver—that ran here and there in the deep furrows along the damp cornlands, under the cool wafts of the breezes, and in the sacred hush in which all life manifests itself on earth.

And yet she noted none of all these things.

They rose up before her, those past days of hunger and want and injustice, with the memory of Antek's faithlessness, and of her manifold sorrows and afflictions—so great that she wondered how she could ever have found strength to bear them, and to await this happier lot now granted her by our Lord.

For behold, there she was, once more upon the farm-lands of Boryna!

And who would now have the power to oust her thence?

During the past six months, she had undergone more than many go through in all their lives: now she could suffer what the Lord should choose her to suffer, until Antek returned to himself, and the land was theirs for ever.

She recalled now how and when the young men had started for the forest expedition.

She had been forced to stay behind; to join them would, in her state, have been a difficult and dangerous attempt.

Antek, she had been told, was not with the others; and this made her uneasy. It was, she thought, no doubt out of spite against the old man his father . . . or possibly to spend the time with Yagna!

The thought had gnawed at her heart: but as to going and spying after him—never!

And then, just before noon, the Gulbas boy had run in, crying: "Victory! the Manor-folk are beaten!" and went past.

She arranged to go with Klembova and meet the men as they were coming home.

And then Paches had come, shouting from afar: "Boryna is slain, Antek slain, and Matthew, and many more!" and, clapping his hands, dropped down with an unintelligible mutter; and his teeth were set so fast (for he was quite senseless) that they must needs prize them open with a knife to give him water.

Happily, others came pouring in along the road from the forest, ere the lad was brought to. These related all that had taken place; and, a little after, Antek arrived, alive and walking by his father's cart; but covered with blood, livid as a corpse, and beside himself.

Deep as was her sorrow, and near as she felt to weeping, she mastered herself nevertheless; and old Bylitsa, her father, took her on one side, and said:

"Look to it: Boryna will presently be no more, Antek



is out of his wits, and there is none to see after Boryna's cabin. The smith will establish himself therein, and who will drive him out then?"

Instantly she had hurried back to her hut and, taking quickly with her her children and all she could lay hands on, returned to her former lodgings on the side of the cabin opposite to where Boryna lived.

So while Ambrose was still bandaging the old man's head, and the folk were out of doors, and the whole village seething with the excitement of victory, and resounding with the groans of the wounded—Hanka slipped quietly into the cabin, and settled there, not to be turned out again.

She watched and guarded the place with great vigilance; for the land was Antek's, and his father was near his last gasp, and might expire at any moment. She knew well how important it was to be first in possession; for he that first fell upon a heritage and took possession of it could scarcely be driven away, and was sure to have the law on his side.

The smith, furious that she had stolen a march on him, now threatened and abused her dreadfully; but she did not mind.

Was she to ask his leave . . . or anyone's? She had taken over all the property, and was guarding it with the fidelity of a dog: who else had the right? She knew that the old man must soon die, and that (as Roch had warned her) Antek would be put in prison.

To whose protection, then, should she fly? Let her help herself, and Heaven might help her.

When Antek was arrested, she took it quietly enough: she had nothing else to do.

And, moreover, with all the house and farm-work upon her shoulders, when could she find time for lamentation?

She neither shirked labour nor (though alone and single-handed) quailed before her enemies: Yagna, and the smith and his wife, all bitterly hostile; the Voyt, whose inclination for Yagna made him favour her strongly; and even his Reverence, whom Dominikova had set against her.

But they all were powerless; she yielded not one jot.

Day by day, her grip upon the homestead grew firmer, and ere a fortnight had gone by, the whole farm was under her control and obeyed her commands.

True, she had to grudge herself food and sleep and rest of any kind, toiling incessantly from early dawn till late into the night.

For one so timid by nature, continually in the past snubbed and brow-beaten by Antek, and accustomed neither to such work nor to such responsibilities, this position was at times especially hard and intolerable: but the dread of being turned out of the place, together with her hatred for Yagna, gave her the strength to pull through.

Whencesoever her energy had come, she remained steadfast at her post; and shortly everyone began to regard her with wonder and respect.

"Dear, dear!" would the best housewives of Lipka say to one another; "once we thought she could not say 'Boo!' to a goose; and lo, she is as good as an able husbandman!" Ploshkova and others even went the length of asking her advice at times, and willingly gave her their own counsel and help.

This she accepted with gratitude, but did not seek society at all, remembering too well how she had been dealt with so short a time ago.

Besides, she cared little for gossip, and had no liking for neighbourly chats and bits of scandal bandied round over the fences.

No. She had enough with her own troubles, and her neighbours' shortcomings did not interest her.

At this stage of her thoughts, Yagna recurred forcibly to her mind—Yagna, with whom she was waging silent but desperate and stubborn warfare. The thought was like a stab in her breast; it made her start up and hurriedly end her prayer, crossing herself and beating her breast.

Returning in no pleasant mood, she was all the more vexed to find everybody asleep in the cottage, and in the outhouses as well.

She rated Vitek soundly, routed Pete out of his litter of



straw, and scolded Yuzka too, for "lying abed when the sun was a span high!"

"If I but take my eyes off them to pray for a moment, I find them all snoozing, each in his corner!" she grumbled, as she lit the fire.

Afterwards, taking the children outside, and cutting some bread for each of them, she called Lapa to play with them, while she went in to see after Boryna.

On that side of the cottage, all was as still as death; and she slammed the door angrily. Yet she did not wake Yagna; and the old man still lay as she had left him the night before, his ashen face, overgrown with a stubbly beard, showing above the red-striped coverlet; worn, gaunt, impassive as the wood-carven image of a saint. His eyes, wide open and motionless, stared right before him; his head was wrapped up in cloths, and his arms hung limp and lifeless, like broken boughs of a tree.

She set his bed in order, shook up the covering about his legs (for the room was close), and gave him some fresh water, which he drank slowly, but made no other motion, lying as still as a felled trunk. Only in his eyes there was a faint glimmer, as that of a river which, between night and dawn, is shadowed forth feebly for the twinkling of an eye.

She heaved a mournful sigh over him, and then, darting a glance of hate at the sleeping Yagna, struck a pail with her foot.

The noise did not wake the latter. She lay, her face turned towards the room, the coverlet thrown back from her bosom on account of the heat, so that her shoulders and throat were bare. Her parted lips, cherry-red, showed a row of shining teeth, like beads of the purest white; her dishevelled hair, fair as the finest sun-dried flax, was streaming over her coverlet and down to the floor.

"Oh! I could dig my nails into that pretty face of yours so deep that it would never be pretty any more!" she hissed with fierce aversion, a sharp pang stabbing at her heart. She mechanically smoothed her hair and looked into the glass that hung by the window, but shrank back on behold-

ing her own faded discoloured features and red-fringed eyelids.

"She! . . . she has naught to try her; feeds abundantly, sleeps in a warm bed, brings forth no children: what should mar *her* beauty?"

And she slammed the door violently as she went out.

This noise woke Yagna; but old Boryna lay as he had lain, staring straight before him.

He had been thus ever since they had brought him home from the fight. At times only did he seem to rouse himself and, taking Yagna's hand, strive to speak; but he always relapsed into insensibility, and could never utter a word.

Roch had brought a doctor from the town, who had examined the man, written a recipe on a scrap of paper, and taken ten roubles. The medicine, too, was costly, and did no more nor less good than Dominikova's incantations, recited gratis.

It soon was clear to all that he would never mend, and so they let him be.

All they now did was to change the wet bandages on his head, and give him a little water or milk to drink; solid food he could not take.

Folk said, and Ambrose, who had experience in such matters, said too, that should Boryna not come to his senses again, he would die shortly, though of course without pain. This end, then, they were daily expecting, but it did not come, and the delay was irksome.

It was Yagna's right and duty to take care of the patient and stay by him; but how could she—she who was unable to remain there an hour? She had more than enough of him as it was; and she was, moreover, weary of the continual struggle with Hanka, who had usurped her place and set her completely aside. She therefore kept out of doors by preference, rejoicing to bask in the warm morning light, and to go out free into the village. She abandoned the care of her husband to Yuzka, and used to wander about, no one knew where, often returning only in the evening.

Yuzka then looked after him; but this was only when



others were by, she being as yet but a little girl, silly and a gadabout, so that Hanka was obliged to watch over the dying man alone. The smith and his wife, indeed, were popping in to look round any number of times a day; but it was she that they came to watch, and to see whether she had taken nothing out of the cottage, eagerly anticipating the possibility of Boryna's recovering his senses enough to bequeath his property.

They snarled round him like dogs quarrelling round a dying sheep, each impatient to get his fangs first into the poor beast's entrails, and carry off the best piece of the carcass. Meanwhile, the blacksmith clutched at everything he could see and lay his hands on; it had to be snatched from him by force and the strictest watch kept; and no day passed by without brawling and furious invectives.

The proverb says that "God gives to everyone who rises with the sun." Yes, but the blacksmith would rise even before, even at midnight, and go galloping ten villages away, if he were but sure of making a good profit.

And now Yagna had scarcely risen and donned her petticoat, when the door creaked, and in he walked with stealthy steps, straight to the bed where old Boryna lay, and peered into his eyes.

"Not a word yet?"

"As he was, so he is!" Yagna said bluntly, putting her hair up under her kerchief.

She was barefoot and scantily attired, still rather drowsy, and overflowing with the strange charm that came forth from her like rays of heat; he could not help eyeing her through his half-closed lids with a greedy stare.

"Do you know," he said, coming close to her, "the old fellow must have a goodly lot of money here? The organist told me that, even before last Yule-tide, Boryna was ready to lend a cool hundred roubles to a man in Debitsa, and the loan only failed because he wanted too high a rate of interest. He must have it somewhere here, hidden away in the cabin.—So keep an eye on Hanka! . . . And ye might take a quiet look round at your leisure. . . ."

"Why not?" she said, throwing her apron over her bare arms, for she felt his glances upon her.

He walked about the room, peeping absently behind the pictures that hung on the walls.

"Have you the key of the store-room?" he asked, with a sly look at the small closed door just by.

"It hangs by the cross near the window."

"About a month since, I lent him a chisel which I want now, but can find it nowhere about. I think it is in there, thrown somewhere amongst odds and ends."

"Look for it yourself. I am not going to seek it for you."

Suddenly, hearing Hanka's voice in the passage, he drew back from the larder-door and hung the key up again.

"Then I shall look in to-morrow," he said, taking his cap.

"Has Roch been here?"

"How should I know? Ask Hanka."

He lingered on a little, scratching his fell of red hair, while his eyes darted to and fro with a furtive expression; then, smiling to himself, he walked out.

Yagna, throwing off her apron, then set about making the bed, now and then glancing at her husband, but taking good care never to meet his open ever-staring eyes.

She loathed and feared and hated him indeed for all the ill he had done to her, and when he called her and stretched out his clammy hands to hers, she felt an agony of repugnance and dread: such a waft of death and the grave emanated from the man! And yet, in spite of all, it was perhaps she who most sincerely wished him to live on.

For she only now realized what she had to lose by his death. With him she had felt herself the mistress; all obeyed her; and the other women, willing or not, had to give her the first place. Why? Only because she was Boryna's wife. And Matthias, though choleric and hard upon her at home, paid her every attention in the presence of others, and made them all respect her.

This she had never seen clearly until Hanka had swooped down on the hut and got the upper hand there; then, at last, she felt herself helpless and ill-treated.



For the land she cared not one whit: what was the land to her? Nothing at all. And though she had been used to give orders, and plume herself on her importance and pride herself on her riches, still she was well enough off at home not to grieve much over their loss. What stung her to the quick was that she must give way to Hanka—to Antek's wife; that it was which she felt intolerable, and which roused all her malice and antagonism.

Her mother, too, together with the blacksmith, was continually egging her on. Else perhaps she might soon have given up the fight; for all those petty bickerings wearied her so, that she would gladly have thrown up everything and gone back to her mother.

But Dominikova had replied sternly: "Never, while he is alive! You must see after your husband; your place is there!"

So she had stayed on, though with dissatisfaction inexpressible: no one to speak to, to smile at, or to call upon!

At home she had that ghastly man by her; and Hanka ever ready for strife; and war—war—war beyond all bearing!

She would sometimes take her distaff the round of the cabins—but that too was an unbearable ordeal. There were only women in the village, dull, heavy, lachrymose, or stormy and boisterous like a day in March: nothing but complaints everywhere, and not one farm-lad in sight!

And now her thoughts began to go back to Antek.

True, she had, in the last days preceding the catastrophe, felt greatly estranged towards him, had never met him but with pain and terror, and been in the end so treated that the very memory was gall and wormwood. But then, she had always had him waiting behind the hayrick in the evening, if she cared to see anyone. . . . In spite, then, of the fear of discovery and his frequent reproaches for her delay, she had gone willingly, forgetful of all the world, when he would seize her in his arms—no permission asked—the fiery monster that he was!

And now she was alone: quite, quite alone! The patient

follower, the persistent watcher, the masterful lover, was there no more. The Voyt indeed caressed her, dallied with her among the hedgerows, or went with her for drinks to the tavern, and would fain have taken Antek's place. But she only allowed him such liberties because they flattered her senses, and there was no one else at hand: who could compare him with Antek?

Besides, she had another motive in this: to flout the village—and Antek not less!

Ah! in the last three days after the fight, how shamefully he had slighted her! Had he not sat all day, all night, at the old man's bedside, nay, even slept upon her own bed, scarce ever leaving the hut; and yet seemed not to see her, though she was always by his side, looking like a dog with wistful eyes for any sign of love?

Never had he once looked upon her: he had eyes only for his father, for Hanka, for the children—and for the dog!

It was that, possibly, which had quenched all her love for him. And so, when he was taken away in irons, he had appeared to her as someone else—as a stranger. She could not find it in her heart to grieve for him; and she eyed with grim pleasure Hanka, tearing her hair, beating her head against the wall, and howling like a dog when her puppies are drowned.

She spitefully enjoyed her agonies, while turning away in disgust from the dreadful madness in Antek's face.

The man he was now she could not so much as remember distinctly, any more than the face of some person she had seen but once: so great was the estrangement between them!

But she recollected all the more clearly the Antek of old—of those loving days—days of trysts and embraces, of kisses and raptures—him for whom her whole being yearned again and again when she woke at night, and her heart, bursting with passionate grief, cried out aloud to him, wildly moaning and longing.

To him of those past days of bliss did her soul cry out; though, indeed, was he anywhere now in the wide world?



Just then he was present—living in her mind—a most sweet vision, when suddenly Hanka's shrill voice drove him from her.

"That woman makes a din like a dog flayed alive!" was her mental comment as the vision faded.

The sun's rays were peeping in obliquely, reddening the murky room; birds warbled; and as the warmth increased, the night's white frost fell in crystal drops from the roof, while she could hear the geese screaming and splashing in the pond.

She set the room in order, for it was Sunday, and she would presently have to get ready for church, and prepare the palm-boughs for the ceremony. She had the red osier shoots, cut the day before, and covered with silvery buds, standing there in a water-jug; and she was about to bind and adorn them carefully, when Vitek shouted through the door:

"Mistress says your cow is lowing for want of food, and you are to feed her."

"Tell her my cow is no business of hers!" she returned, at the top of her voice, and listened to what the other would scream in reply.

"Oh," she thought, "you may yell till you're hoarse: ye will not put me out of humour to-day!"

And thereupon she began to choose at leisure the dress she was to wear to church. But a sudden dreary thought came to cloud her bright sky and make the whole world sombre for her.—Why should she attire herself at all?—for whom?

For those hateful women, whose eyes would count the cost of every ribbon, whose tongues would cover her with foul aspersions?

This painful reflection made her turn away from her dresses, and she set about combing her abundant locks, as she gazed mournfully out of the window at the village, bathed in sunshine and agleam with dew; at the white cabins, visible behind their orchards, with plumes of blue smoke crowning their roofs; at the red wavy shadows of many a woman's petticoat, glancing through the green of the trees

on the shore, both reflected in the waters; at the geese, which seemed to swim in long lines athwart the azure image of the sky and form dark semicircles, uncoiling themselves like snakes; and at the white-bellied gleaming swallows, sweeping down and up again along and above its surface.

Then she looked away from all these, and up to the dark-blue sky, wherein the clouds moved like a flock of woolly sheep on a pasture-ground; and, far above, birds were flying unseen, so high that only their long plaintive thrilling cry was to be heard—a sound that filled her heart with such sadness that her eyes grew dim, as she cast them down and gazed on the world around her, on the rolling water and the waving trees. Only she now saw nothing in them but the echo of her own dejection, that caused the tears to start on her pale cheeks, dropping down one after another, like the beads of a broken rosary, that fell out of the innermost core of her heart!

What was it that now came over her?—She had no idea herself.

Something, she felt, was seizing her, lifting her up, carrying her away—an invincible longing; and whithersoever it should take her, thither she would go without fail. So she wept on involuntarily and almost painlessly: thus a tree, laden with blossoms, warmed by the sun and waving in the breezes of a springtide morning, drips with abundant dew, draws life-giving sap from the soil, and lifts its boughs and blossoming sprays.

"Vitek!" the shrill voice of Hanka was crying again. "Ask the lady there if she will kindly come round to breakfast."

Yagna woke up from her trance, wiped her tears, finished combing her hair, and hastened in.

They were all sitting at breakfast in Hanka's room. The potatoes smoked in a huge dish, over which Yuzka had just poured a quantity of cream, fried and seasoned with onions; they had set to lustily, and all the spoons were hard at work.

Hanka had taken the first place, in the middle; Pete sat at one end, Vitek squatting on the floor beside him; and



Yuzka took her meal standing and seeing to the service. The children were enjoying a well-filled platter by the fire, and at the same time using their spoons to keep off Lapa, that wanted to eat from their dish.

Yagna's place was near the door, opposite to Pete.

The meal was a dull one, taken with downcast eyes most of the time.

Yuzka tried in vain to rattle away after her fashion; Pete came in now and then with a word, and even Hanka, touched by the wistful look in Yagna's eyes, strove to make conversation. But her guest said not one single word.

"Who gave you that bruise, Vitek?" Hanka inquired.

"Oh, I struck my head against the manger!" But he turned as red as a crayfish and rubbed the place, with a meaning glance towards Yuzka.

"Have you brought any palm-boughs yet?"

"As soon as I have done breakfast, I shall go for them," he replied, eating at a great rate.

Here Yagna put down her spoon and went out.

"What has come to her?" Yuzka whispered to Pete, as she helped him to some more *barszcz*.

"Some folk have not your gift of continual babbling.—Has she milked her cow?"

"I saw her take a pail to the byre."

"By the by, Yuzka, we must get some oil-cake for the 'Grey One.'"

"Yes, I saw this morning that her milk was turned to beestings."

"If so, she will calve in a day or two."

"Will you come to church for the palm-bough blessing?" Yuzka asked her.

"Go along with Vitek. And Pete may go likewise, when the horses have been seen to. I must stay and take care of Father. And perhaps Roch may be coming in, with news of Antek."

"Shall I tell Yagustynka to come to-morrow for the potato-planting?"

"Surely: we alone should be too few for the work, and the choice has to be quickly made."

"And about the dung?"

"Pete will have done carting it to the field by to-morrow at noon, and will set about spreading it along with Vitek after dinner; you too must help them as soon as you have time."

A loud cackling of geese outside—and in burst Vitek, gasping for breath.

"What! can you not even let the geese be?"

"They wanted to bite me: I was only keeping them off!"

And he threw down a large bundle of osier rods, sprinkled all over with catkins, and still wet with dew; which Yuzka instantly made into smaller bundles, tied them with red woollen thread, and asked him in a whisper:

"Was it the stork that gave you such a blow on the forehead?"

"It was; but tell no one." He cast a look at his mistress, busy taking the Sunday clothes out of the chest. "I'll tell you all. . . . I had noticed that it used to spend the night in the porch; so I slipped in there, when everyone was asleep. . . . Though it pecked at me, I had it fast, and was about to wrap it in my spencer and carry it off . . . but the dogs got scent of me, and I had to run for it. . . . One of my trouser-legs is torn.—But I'll have the bird still."

"What if the priest gets to know that you have his stork?"

"His? It is mine! . . . And who will tell him?"

"Where can you put it, that it may not be found?"

"I know of a hiding-place, safe from the gendarmes themselves. After a time I shall take it back to the cabin, and let them believe I have caught and tamed another stork. Who will find out that it is the same one?—Only say naught, and I'll get you some birds—or a leveret."

"Am I a boy, to play with birds? You silly thing!—Off and dress: we shall go to church together."

"Yuzka, let me carry the palm-boughs, will ye?"

"A pretty saying! Ye know that only women may take them to be blessed."



"I mean, through the village: ye shall have them back before we are in the church."

He begged her so earnestly that she consented, and turned to Nastka, who had just come in, clad in her best, and with a palm-bough in her hand.

"Any news of Matthew?" Hanka asked her at once.

"Only what the Voyt said yesterday: he's better."

"The Voyt knows naught, and makes up tales to please us."

"But he told his Reverence just the same."

"Then why said he nothing about Antek?"

"No doubt because Matthew is with the others, and Antek in a separate cell."

"He's but a babbler that wants to talk."

"Did he say aught to you?"

"He comes daily, but only to see Yagna. With her he has some private business, so they meet and speak of it. Apart. In the enclosure."

She had lowered her tone, and laid stress on every word, looking out of the window the while. Just then, Yagna appeared outside the porch, very well appparelled, a palm-bough in one hand, a prayer-book in the other. Hanka's eyes followed her out.

"The folk are on their way to church."

"Why, the bells have not sounded yet!"

But, just as she spoke, they rang out with a clash and a roar, booming and thundering their call to church.

In a few minutes, all the people had gone.

Hanka, left alone, put the pots on the fire to boil, and then took the children out of doors to comb them thoroughly—a thing she had never time to do properly on work-days.

She then went with them to the straw with which the potato-pits were strewn, and left them there to play. After which, having gone into the hut, and looked into every pot and pan, she said her rosary; for she had too much difficulty with her prayer-book.

It was now hard upon noontide, and Lipka was plunged deep in Sunday rest, with no sounds but the chirping of sparrows, or the twittering of the nest-building swallows under

the eaves, in the warm early spring weather. Over everything hung the strangely resplendent canopy of a bright blue sky; and the fruit-trees stretched out their branches, covered with big buds, and the alders fringing the pond waved their yellow catkins silently, and the rust-coloured poplar shoots swelled with viscid aromatic sprouts opening to the light, like the gaping beaks of nestlings that want food.

On the warm cabin walls, flies had already begun to cluster, and from time to time a bee hummed about the daisies, or over the bushes, bursting out into little tongues of green flame.

Only a damp wind still continued to blow from the outlying fields and woodlands.

It was about the middle of Mass; for the sounds of far-off chants mingled with the notes of the organ, and at times with the faint tinkling of tiny bells, which could just be heard in the quiet spring air.

Time went by slowly, till—when the sun was highest—all was most silent, and only a stork clattered along, skimming the ground in its low flight, or crows on the watch to steal away a gosling would fly over the pond, arousing the ganders' angry screams.

Hanka went on with her prayers, watching meantime over the little ones, or going in to see her father-in-law, who lay motionless and staring glassily as ever; little by little ripening for death, like an ear of corn in the sun, awaiting the reaper's sickle. . . . He could recognize no one. Even when calling for Yagna and taking her hand, his eyes were looking far away. But Hanka fancied that the sound of her own voice made him move his lips, while his eyes expressed the wish to say something.

It was a pitiful sight indeed, she thought, when she came thus to visit him.

"Lord! who would have expected it? Such an able farmer, so clever, so wealthy a man! and now lying here like a tree smitten by a thunderbolt, with branches still leafy, but already inevitably given over to death!—not dead, yet no longer living.



"And indeed, though the God of mercy is the Almighty One, still the doom of man is hard, and not to be escaped. . . ."

But it was now past noon, and the cows had to be milked; so she heaved a sigh, and ended her prayers. Sighs were but sighs: work was duty, and must come first.

On her return with brimming pails, she found everybody back home again. Yuzka told her about the sermon, and the folk that were at church; and presently the room became very noisy; for she had brought with her several girls of her own age, who set about swallowing the buds from the consecrated palm-boughs, which were believed to be a preservative against sore throats. They laughed a good deal, more than one of them finding the downy catkins impossible to get down (they made them cough so) unless with the aid of drinks of water, or thumps upon the back: which latter remedy Vitek was very willing to administer.

Yagna did not come in for dinner; she had been seen walking out with her mother and the blacksmith.—They had scarce got through the meal, when Roch came in. All welcomed him warmly, feeling that closer ties than those of blood united him to them. He had for each a kind word, and a kiss on the crown of the head; but he would take no food. He was exceedingly tired, and glanced uneasily about the room, Hanka following his glances, but not venturing to ask questions.

Without looking at her, he said in a whisper: "I have seen Antek."

She started up from the chest she was sitting on, and the strong emotion which gripped her heart prevented her from saying a word.

"He's quite well, and in good spirits. A warder was present; but I had speech with him for at least an hour."

"Is he—is he in irons?" she asked, in a strangled voice.

"The idea! No more than the others. . . . He is not ill-used; do not frighten yourself."

"But Koziol says they are flogged there, and chained to the walls."

"It may be so in other cases; but Antek told me no one had touched him."

She clasped her hands with joy, and her face lit up.

"On my departure, he said that ye had without fail to kill the pig before Easter: he too would like to taste the *Hallow-fare*."<sup>1</sup>

"Alas! the poor man is starving there, no doubt," she remarked, plaintively.

"But," Yuzka ventured to put in, "Father told us that, when fat, it was to be sold."

"He did; only," Hanka said inflexibly, "now that Antek orders it to be killed, his will takes the place of his father's."

"He also sends you word," Roch continued, "that you are to do the needful as concerns all the field-work.—I had told him what a good beginning ye had made."

"And what did he say to that?" asked Hanka, radiant.

"He said that ye were able to do whatever ye chose to do."

"Yes, I shall be able—I shall!" she cried, her eyes bright with intense resolve.

"But will they set him free soon?" she inquired anxiously.

"Directly after Easter, it may be, but perhaps somewhat later. At any rate, as soon as the inquiry is over. It drags on so," he added, with partial truth, avoiding her eyes, "because the accused are so numerous—the whole village, in fact."

"Did he ask about the house . . . or the children . . . or me?"

She longed also to add: "or Yagna?" But she durst not put the question so openly; nor had she the art of drawing him on to tell her what she wanted. Moreover, it was now

<sup>1</sup> *Hallow-fare*—in Polish, *swiecone*—consists of various meats and pastry solemnly blessed in each house by a priest on Holy Saturday, and eaten at Eastertide, together with the consecrated Easter eggs; probably a Christianized survival of some spring festival among the heathen Slavs.—*Translator's Note*.



too late: the news of Roch's coming had spread throughout the village, and the bells had not yet tolled for Evensong, when the women came crowding in to hear the news about their absent ones.

Sitting down near the entrance outside the cabin, he told them all he knew about each one in particular. He had nothing distressing to relate; but the women who heard him began presently to whimper, and even to weep aloud.

He afterwards went out into the village, entering pretty nearly every hut. With his saint-like figure and his long white beard, and the words of consolation which he uttered, he filled every cabin with light and comfort and hope. Yet their tears flowed still more abundantly, and their feelings of sorrow revived, and they were depressed by the memory of past sufferings.

The day before, Klembova had told Agata that Lipka now resembled an open grave. She had spoken the truth. The place looked as in the days of old, when the plague had passed over it, and most of the inhabitants had gone to their graves, or as when the lands had been devastated by war: so that the cottages were desolate and filled only with women's laments, the wailing of children, complaints, mourning, and that sharp torture which is the reminiscence of agonies gone by.

What they were suffering now baffles description.

Three weeks had passed; and Lipka, instead of calming down, felt the injury and wrong done increasing every day, nay, every morning and noon and nightfall: whether within the huts or without, cries of indignation resounded, and a craving for revenge, like a hellish weed sown by Satan, sprang up and flourished in every heart. And many a fist was clenched, many a reckless word said, and many an imprecation thundered forth.

So that Roch's words to soothe them—just as a stick thoughtlessly thrust into a heap of dying embers may make them burst into flame again—had only the effect of rousing the smouldering bitterness and the memory of injustice committed.—That afternoon, but few went to Vespers.

They gathered in groups filling the enclosures, or out upon the roads, and even in the tavern, full of grief and uttering fierce curses.

Hanka alone felt a little comforted. Her husband's praises had filled her with strength and glad expectation, and she was eager to work and show him that she was equal to the emergency—eager beyond all expression.

The other women had left the place; the smith's wife had gone to sit at Boryna's bedside; and Hanka went to the sty with Yuzka. They let the pig out: it was so fat that it fell wallowing in the dirt, and refused to stir any more.

"Give it nothing else to eat to-day, so that its bowels may be cleansed."

"'Twas well, then, that I forgot to feed it this afternoon."

"Good: if so, we shall kill it to-morrow. Have you told Yagustynka to come?"

"I have. She says she will be here in the evening."

"Dress yourself and run to Ambrose. He must come here to-morrow after Mass at the latest, and bring with him all things needful."

"But will he be able?—His Reverence has said two priests will come hither to-morrow to hear confessions."

"He knows well I'll give him vodka in plenty: he'll find time, be sure.—No one can kill a pig, and cut it up, and season it in such good style as he. . . . And Yagustynka likewise will be of use."

"Then may I go to town early in the morning for the salt and other seasonings?"

"Say for an airing, you little gadabout.—No, we can get all we want at Yankel's: I shall go there directly.—And, Yuzka!" she called after her; "where are Pete and Vitek?"

"Out in the meadows, I dare say. I saw Pete take his violin with him."

"If you find them, send them hither. They must bring round the trough that stands in the outhouse, and place it here in front of the cabin: in the morning, we shall scald and scour it."



Glad to get out of doors, Yuzka ran straight to Nastka, with whom she went to seek old Ambrose.

Hanka, however, did not go to the tavern then, her father having crawled round to see her.

She gave him something to eat, and had the pleasure of telling him what Roch had said about Antek.—Suddenly Magda burst in, crying:

"Something is the matter with Father: come this instant!"

Boryna was sitting up, his legs out of bed, and looking round the room. Hanka ran to prevent him from falling. He eyed her well, and then looked fixedly on the blacksmith, who had just run in unexpectedly.

"Hanka!"

He spoke aloud, distinctly, in a voice that startled her.

"Here I am," she answered, trembling.

"How is it out of doors?"

It was a strange voice—strange and broken.

"Spring is here, and the weather warm," she faltered.

"Are they not up yet? Afield, they should be!"

Bewildered, they sought words in vain: Magda burst out crying.

"Defend what's yours, boys! No giving way!"

His voice had risen to a shout. Suddenly he stopped, and rocked to and fro so violently in Hanka's arms that the smith and his wife tried to take her place. But though her arms and back were aching, she held him nevertheless. All three gazed on him, awaiting his next words.

"The barley must be sown first.—To the rescue, boys! Rally round me!" he shrieked all at once in an awful voice, and fell stiffly back, while his eyes closed, and something gurgled in his throat.

"O Lord! he is dying—dying!" Hanka screamed, and shook him with all her might, unconscious of what she did.

Magda put a consecrated taper in his hand, and lit it.

"Michael! The priest!—At once!"

But ere her husband could go out, Boryna opened his eyes; and the taper fell from his hand and broke.

"It has passed. . . . Look, he seeks something," Michael

whispered, bending over him. But the old man, now quite himself again, pushed him aside unhesitatingly, and called:

"Hanka! Send these folk away!"

Magda, in tears, fell down before him; but he seemed not to know her.

"None of that. . . . No use. . . . Send them out," he repeated obstinately.

"Do pray go—into the passage at least; do not vex him," she said imploringly.

"Magda, you go: I will not budge hence," the blacksmith hissed, guessing that Boryna had something to tell Hanka.

But the old man heard and, raising himself up in bed, gave him so terrible a glance as he pointed to the door, that Michael shrank back with a curse and rejoined Magda, who was weeping outside. But, quickly recovering his self-possession, he slipped round as close as he could to the window that was just by the head of Boryna's bed, and did all he could to make out what was said within.

After the smith had gone, "Sit down here, by my side," Boryna commanded Hanka. Greatly moved, she obeyed him.

"You will find some money in the larder: hide it, lest it be snatched from you."

"Where is it?" she asked, trembling with excitement.

"In amongst the corn."

He spoke distinctly, stopping at every word. Mastering her fear, she looked into his eyes, which glistened strangely.

"Defend Antek . . . rather sell half the property. . . . He must not be forsaken . . ."

He said no more, but fell back on to the pillow, trying to stammer a word or two and lift himself up, but uselessly; and now his eyes were quenched and dim.

Hanka, terrified, cried out; and both the others rushed in, ministering to the sick man, and gave him some water to drink. But he did not come to himself, and lay, as he had lain, stiff and motionless, with staring eyes that seemed to note nothing around him.

They sat long with him, both women silent, but in tears.



Dusk fell, the room grew dark, and they went out. Only so much remained of day as empurpled the mill-pond from the last glow in the West.

Turning round upon Hanka, the smith asked her: "What has he told you?"

"What ye both have heard."

"But what said he when alone with you?"

"Nothing else."

"Do not enrage me, Hanka, or you'll rue it!"

"What do I care for threats of yours?"

"The old man put something in your hand," the smith added, throwing out a feeler.

"Ye may go seek it in the dunghill, then."

He rushed at her and might have done her some injury, but that Yagustynka, who came up just then, said after her sour fashion:

"Oho! you both get on so lovingly that the whole village is talking about you two!"

With an imprecation, he went his way.

The night had come—starless, with a wind that rustled soft and sad through the trees, presaging a change of weather.

There was light and noise in Hanka's room, supper preparing at the crackling fire, elderly women holding forth with Yagustynka upon various matters, and Yuzka sitting outside with Nastka and with Yasyek Topsy-turvy; while Pete was drawing out of his violin such wailing notes as made their hearts feel sorrowful. Hanka alone was unable to stay seated, and, continually pondering over Boryna's words, looked again and again round into the room where he lay.

"Pete, have done!" she cried. "Why, it will presently be Holy Monday, and still you fiddle and fiddle!—'Tis a sin!"

She scolded the man, simply because she was so upset, and fell nigh weeping. He gave over, and they all went into the big room.

Several times that evening she heard the dogs barking loud within the enclosure, and set them on:

"At him, Lapa!—At him, Burek!—At him!"

But each time the dogs ceased suddenly, and came back, wagging their tails with satisfaction.

This took place so often that a fearful suspicion arose in her mind.

"Pete, take heed to lock and bolt everything well. Someone is prowling nigh, and no stranger either; for the dogs know him!"

At last all went to bed and to sleep—all but Hanka. She made sure that all the doors were locked; then she stood lending an attentive ear for a long time.

"Among the corn!—In one of the barrels, I dare say. . . . Ah, what if someone has forestalled me?"

The very thought made her heart throb, and brought a cold sweat to her brow. That night she hardly slept at all.



### CHAPTER III

“**Y**UZKA, kindle the fire; fill all our pots with water, and put them on to boil. I am off to Yankel’s to get the seasonings.”

“Then hurry; Ambrose will be here straightway.”

“No fear; he cannot come so early. He has his duties to perform in church.”

“Only to ring the bell for Mass. Roch is going to take his place for all the rest.”

“Well, I shall be in time. Meanwhile, you hurry the lads, make them scour the trough quickly, and bring it outside the cabin.—Yagustynka will be here presently: let her wash the tubs.—Also the empty barrels must be taken out of the larder and rolled into the pond, to get the staves properly soaked and swollen out.—Do not wake the little ones; so long as they sleep, they’ll be less in the way.”—And, having given her orders and tied her apron over her head, she hastened out into the air of an early and very muggy and rainy morning.

The day was dismal, wet, and most unpleasantly cold; grey mists dripped and drizzled, the slippery roads were sodden and dank, the drab-coloured huts loomed faintly through the rain that fell; the trees, drooping gloomily over the pond, were seen like tremulous shrinking swaying shadows, as dim as if they had been made of mist; in this foul weather, there was scarce any landscape visible, and no one was out as yet. It was only when the Mass-bell began to tinkle that a few red petticoats were seen picking their way through the mire to church.

Hanka tripped on swiftly, thinking she might perhaps meet Ambrose at the turning of the road; but he was nowhere

in sight. Only the priest's old blind horse, as usual at that hour of the day, was going down to the pond with a large barrel, drawn on sledge-runners, stopping and stumbling at every rut, yet finding its way to the place by scent: the farm-lad waiting for it having sheltered himself from the rain in the bushes, and begun smoking a cigarette.

Just in front of the priest's house, a britzka drawn by a couple of well-fed chestnut horses, had pulled up and the ruddy-faced incumbent of Laznov stepped out of it.

"Come to hear confessions, along with his Reverence of Slupia," she thought, as she looked in vain for Ambrose. She went on round the church by the poplar road, where the mire was yet more abundant, and the trees, plunged in the vapoury mizzle, looked like shadows seen through a steam-clouded pane. Passing the tavern, she struck off in the squashy pathway that led to her sister's.

She would, she reckoned, have time enough for a call on her father, and a talk with her sister, with whom, now that she had removed to Boryna's, she was on very friendly terms.

"Yuzka told me yesterday that Father was not well!" she exclaimed on entering.

"Ah, what's to be done? He is lying in bed under his sheep-skin, and moaning, and talking about being ill," Veronka moodily replied.

"How cold it is here! I feel it creeping up the calves of my legs!"

"And have I any fuel at all? Who will go and fetch me a few dry faggots? How can I trudge to the forest and come home with a load of brushwood when there's so much other work to do? You see, I must manage all by myself."

They then both fell to lamenting over their sad fate.

"When Staho was here, I thought nothing of all he did at home. When the husband is gone, ah! then one knows what a help he is!—Are you going to town?"

"Certainly; I should have gone before, but Roch told me that visits would not be allowed until Eastertide. Therefore shall I go on Sunday, and take my poor husband a few morsels of our Hallow-fare."



"I fain would do the same for mine; but what have I to take to him? A mouthful of bread?"

"Be easy; I will prepare enough for them both; and we shall take it together."

"God reward you for your kindness; I will work for you in return."

"Do not speak of work in return: 'tis a gift I make you from my heart." She lowered her voice. "Well do I know poverty: it is a dog whose teeth bite deep."

"And that is so faithful and attached that it never will leave us till we die!—I thought I had a little money laid by, and hoped to purchase a pig in spring, and fatten it up, with no small profit when autumn came. Well, I had to give all to Staho, and my savings have run out like water: I have naught now. That is what comes of his standing up for the rights of our folk!"

"Nay, say not so. He went freely to protect them, and an acre or so of the wood will be yours."

"*Will be!* Aye, but 'while the grass grows, the steed starves!' And 'To him that can pay, the musicians play.' But 'Poor man, coin to money your sweat, and be glad that ye ever have eat!'"

"Are ye greatly in want?" she inquired, hesitatingly.

"I have naught in the world," she cried, flinging out her hands in despair, "but what the Jew or the miller will give me on credit!"

"Would I could help you! But the homestead where I dwell is not mine. I am baited as with dogs around me, and must take such heed lest they drive me from the cabin that I am at times clean out of my wits."

The previous night's experience came back to her forcibly.

"Meantime," her sister put in, "Yagna takes no care. She is a shrewd one, she, and enjoys herself to the full!"

"How so?"

She had risen from her seat, and was looking at her sister with alarm. Had Yagna found and taken the money?

"Oh, she only takes what pleasure she can get out of life:

dresses well, calls on her good friends, and has seven holidays a week. She was seen sitting with the Voyt in the tavern parlour yesterday, and the Jew could not fetch them drinks fast enough!"

"Everything must come to an end," Hanka muttered sullenly, tying her apron over her head to go.

"True: but then 'Pleasure, once taken, cannot be snatched from you'—and she knows it."

"'Tis easy to be wise in that way, if one has naught to care about!—But, Veronka, we are to kill the pig to-day: come you this evening to help." And, cutting short her sister's everlasting complaints, she made her way out.

Her father, who was now in the room she had once occupied, lay moaning and almost hidden under a heap of straw.

"What ails ye, Father?"

She sat down by his side.

"Nothing, my dear daughter, nothing: only the ague shakes me sorely, and my inwards are wrung and twisted."

"Because 'tis here as wet and as cold as out of doors. Rise and come over to us; ye can tend the children. And then—we shall kill the pig . . . if so be as ye have a mind to eat of it?"

"To eat? Aye, a little. They forgot to give me any food yesterday.—I shall come, Hanka, I shall come!" And he sighed, but with pleasure, as he crept out of the straw bed.

Hanka, her mind full of the thought of Yagna, walked over to the tavern as fast as she could.

The Jew no longer exacted payment in advance, but with the most obsequious eagerness weighed and measured out all she wanted, setting out many another article besides, to tempt her.

She was very short with him. "Yankel!" she said haughtily; "give what I ask, and no more. I am no child, and know what I wish to have."

But the Jew only smiled. She had bought things for between ten and twenty *zloty*, and also enough vodka to suf-



fice for the coming festival of Easter besides; and rolls in scores, and loaves of fine bread, and eight salt herrings . . . and even, to crown all, a small bottle of rum. Hardly could she carry the parcel, when made up.

"What! That Yagna enjoys herself: and I, who work so hard, am I to be worse off than a dog?"

But, though such was her thought on setting out, it was speedily followed by remorse. The expense was unnecessary. —But for shame, she would have made the Jew take the rum back again.

She found everybody in the cabin busy preparing things. Ambrose sat by the fire, exchanging verbal thrusts with Yagustynka, who was engaged in scalding the various vessels to be used; and the room was full of steam.

"We were waiting for you, to knock your little pig on the head!"

"Ye have arrived very early!"

"I made Roch take my place in the sacristy; the priest's manservant is to blow the organ-bellows, and Magda will sweep out the church. I have arranged everything, so that you may not be disappointed. The priests will not begin hearing confessions till they have finished breakfast.—But how cold it is to-day!" he cried out querulously; "I feel it to the very marrow."

"Broiling at the fire, can you talk of the cold?" Yuzka cried out in amazement.

"You are silly: I feel so cold within, that even my wooden leg's quite numb!"

"Ye shall soon have something to warm you.—Yuzka, soak a herring directly."

"Give it me salt as it is; nothing takes the salt out like vodka—when there's enough of it."

"Ye're always the same," Yagustynka observed snappishly. "Should ye hear glasses jingle even at midnight, ye'd rise on the spot for a drink."

"Right, my good woman. But your tongue is very dry, is it not? you too would like to wet it in vodka, eh?" He laughed and rubbed his hands.

"My ancient! I'll drink glass for glass with you any day!"

Here Hanka interrupted them; their continual hints and innuendoes about vodka were teasing her.

"Very few people are going to church as yet," she remarked, to change the subject.

"'Tis early. They will presently come with a rush to get rid of their sins."

"Aye," said Yagustynka, "to spend the time, hear something new, and prepare to sin again!"

Here Yuzka's shrill voice piped: "The girls were already preparing confessions yesternight."

"Because," Yagustynka said, "they are ashamed to confess to their own priest."

"Better, old crone, ye sat in the church-porch and said your beads and did penance, than backbite your neighbours so!"

"I will, Wooden Leg! when ye sit by my side there!"

"Oh, I am in no hurry. I intend first to toll for you and put you to bed with a shovel!"

The words enraged her. "Bait me not, or you'll rue it!" she snarled.

"My stick will ward off your bites; and 'twere pity to lose your last teeth!"

She made no answer. Just then Hanka filled a glass, and drank to them both, and Yuzka brought a herring to Am-brose, who slapped it against his wooden leg, skinned it, broiled it over the coals, and ate it with relish.

"To work! We have been dawdling too long!" he cried, taking off his coat, tucking up his shirt-sleeves, and giving his knife a last edge on his whetstone. Then, seizing a large club, used to mash potatoes, for the pig, he hastened out, everybody following him.

Pete aided him, and the beast, though resisting with all its might, was dragged out into the yard.

"Quick! the dish for the blood!"

All stood round, eyeing its plump creamy sides and trailing belly, which the drizzle from the mists that filled the



orchard was wetting fast. A few women stood outside the yard, and several children, eager to look on, had climbed the palings.

Ambrose crossed himself, and came forward slantwise towards the pig, his club held back at an angle on one side. Then, coming to a standstill, he suddenly lifted his arm, and, twisting his body round with so forcible a writhe that his neck shirt-button flew off, brought his weapon down right between the ears. The animal's forelegs gave way, and it went down squealing. He redoubled the blow, this time with both hands. The pig rolled on to one side, kicking convulsively: Ambrose then, astride on its belly, thrust the whole of his knife's gleaming blade into its heart.

A dish was at hand: the blood, streaming like warm water, spirted out in rhythmical squirts, with a bubbling sound.

"Away, Lapa!—Look at that wicked dog!—Wants to lap some, and Lent not over yet!" he cried, breathless with exertion, as he drove the dog from the dish: for a centenarian, the effort had been considerable.

"Shall we do the scalding in the passage?"

"Rather take the trough into the room where the carcass is to hang till we quarter it."

"Will there not be too little space in the room?"

"Not in the larger room—your father-in-law's. He will suffer nothing. Only let's hurry: the bristles come out more readily while the carcass is yet warm."

As he gave his directions, he was busy pulling out the long bristles down the back.

In a short time the carcass was scalded, unhaired, thoroughly cleansed, hung up in Boryna's room, and stretched out wide open with a lath tied to a rafter.

Yagna was out, having gone to church early in the morning, and never dreaming that such a liberty would be taken. Her husband lay as usual, staring with lack-lustre eyes.

They worked noiselessly at first, often looking round at him; but soon they forgot his presence, interested as they

were in the pig, whose thick layer of fat far exceeded their expectations.

"We have lulled him to sleep, we have brought him in here: 'tis time that some vodka should flow in his honour!" cried Ambrose, washing his hands over the trough.

"Come to breakfast, and you'll have some drink."

Indeed, before he sat down to the potatoes and *barszcz* which formed the meal, he had tossed off a copious draught of vodka. He ate little, though, being in a hurry to go on with the work, and urged the others to make haste, especially Yagustynka, who was by no means his inferior in the salting and seasoning line, and knew as much as ever he did.

Hanka, too, did her best to give aid, and so did Yuzka, eager to stay in the hut beside the newly killed porker, and not at all willing to go out.

But Hanka cried out to her: "Be off at once, and order them to cart the dung away, and lend them a hand yourself, while they are spreading it! The sluggards! I fear the work will not be over by this evening."

So Yuzka, much against her will, ran out into the yard, where she was heard for a long while, venting all her ill humour on the two farm-lads, and scolding them violently.

The cabin became noisier, little by little, as gossip after gossip dropped in to chat in neighbourly wise, and clasp their hands, and admire the porker.

"So fine! so laden with fat! Far finer a one than either the miller's or the organist's!"

Hanka felt much pleased, and was puffed up with these praises of the fatted beast; and though indeed she grudged the vodka, she could not help inviting them, according to the custom among the peasants to offer drinks, and bread and salt, on such an occasion. And she became very talkative to all the folk who crossed the threshold one after another and came in, as one comes into church for a short visit on the feast of the patron saint.—Children, too, were plentiful all round the house, and peeping in at every window.

All through Lipka, besides, there now began to be a good



deal of unusual movement: folk splashing along in the mud, and carts clattering in from other villages, all crowding to church for their Easter confession, in spite of the detestable roads and the dismal weather, so wretchedly changeable! Every now and then there came a flaw of rain, and then a warm breeze would blow athwart the orchards, or frozen snow pour down like groats, or the sun look smiling out of the clouds and scatter its gold over all the world. But the weather is usually so in the first days of spring—like a young lass that laughs and cries, and is blithe or sullen, just as it occurs to her, and she herself cannot tell why.

But no one in Hanka's surroundings had any care for the weather just now: work and talk went on with equal noise. Ambrose bustled about, and kept the others lively with his merry jests. He was obliged, however, to pay frequent visits to the church and see that everything there was going on well: on his return, he would complain of the cold and want something to warm him up.

"I have so well beset the priests with penitents, that neither will stir till noon," he said.

"Of the priest from Slupia they say," Yagustynka observed, after a gibe at the incumbent of Laznov which nettled Ambrose not a little, "that he always bears a scent-bottle with him, for that he dislikes the scent of common folk, and fans himself with his handkerchief after every confession."

"You hold your peace, and let priests alone!" Ambrose cried out in a rage.

"Is Roch in church?" Hanka hastened to inquire; she too disliked the old woman's waspish tongue.

"He has been there all the morning, serving Masses, and putting things in order."

"And where is Michael, then?"

"Gone to Rzepki with the organist's son, to make out the confession-list."

"'Plough with a goose-quill, sow paper with sand: ye will get much more pelf than by tilling the land!'" muttered Yagustynka.

"Truly it is so. He gets an egg at least for each name he puts down."

"And the confession-tickets come to a kopek and a half! No wonder his wallets are crammed with good things. Last week the organist's wife sold near upon fifteen hundred eggs."

"Folk say they came on foot, carrying only one small bundle with them: now they could fill over four of the biggest wagons."

Ambrose tried to defend him. "Well, but he has lived and worked here for a score of years and more; and the parish is a big one; and he is hard-working, shrewd and thrifty: of course he has put money by."

"Put money by! Money wrung from the people, and as much as he possibly could! Ere the man will do a service to anyone, he must know what he's to get thereby. Why, he is paid thirty roubles at a funeral: for what?—for thumping on the organ and bleating Latin chants!"

"At any rate, he's a skilled craftsman in his own line, and takes great pains to do his best."

"Aye, aye, he is skilled: knows when to sing shrill and when gruff—and especially how to diddle folk out of their money."

"Another would have drunk away all his earnings; and he is breeding up his son to become a priest."

"To his own exceeding glory and profit," the rancorous beldame rejoined.

At this most interesting point they broke off. Yagna had come in, and stood petrified on the threshold.

"Is it our pig's size that amazes you?" Yagustynka asked, with a laugh.

"Could ye not have done this work on the other side?" she stammered, red as a peony. "My room is all befouled with it."

"Wash and scour it, then! Ye are not short of time," Hanka replied coolly, with a stress on the last words.

Yagna made an angry gesture, but said no more. She walked about the room, took up her "Rosary of the Passion,"



threw a shawl over her yet unmade bed, and left the hut in silence, her lips twitching with the fury she sought to hide.

Yuzka, who met her in the passage, said: "Ye might well help us, we have so much to do!"

She only stormed at her in reply, and rushed away in a frenzy. Vitek, who had remarked which way she had gone, said she had stepped over straight to the blacksmith's.

"Why should she not? It will relieve her to talk of her grievance."

"But," Yagustynka said, lowering her voice, "ye will have him here speedily . . . and it will be war!"

"Good woman, what's my whole life but warfare?" Hanka answered quietly, but she felt that her words were true, and that a savage quarrel was at hand.

"He will come in a trice," Yagustynka declared, not without compassion.

"Fear not—I shall stand the brunt of the battle," she replied, smiling.

Yagustynka, nodding her admiration, looked significantly at Ambrose, who had just laid his work aside.

"I must look in at church and ring the Angelus," he said. "I shall be back for dinner directly."

And so he was, and told them that the clergymen were dining, and the miller had brought them a netful of fish as a present, and they were to go on hearing confessions in the afternoon, as so many people were waiting.

The dinner, though short and hurried, was well provided with liquor, Ambrose complaining bitterly that, for such herrings—salt as Lot's wife—the vodka was far too weak. Then they set to work again, and he quartered the beast, cutting off the parts fit for sausages; while Yagustynka, having unhinged a door and made it do duty for a table, placed the sides upon it, and was busy cutting them into flitches and salting them carefully. Just at that moment the smith came in; his face showed that he was fighting for self-control.

"I was not aware," he began, sarcastically, "that ye had bought so large a porker."

"Well, I have—and killed it too."

She felt somewhat frightened.

"A fine beast. It must have cost you some thirty roubles."

He eyed it over scrutinizingly.

"'Twere hard to find a pig so thickly lined with fat," the old woman remarked, laughing and offering him the bacon to examine.

"'Tis Boryna's pig!" he suddenly burst out, unable any more to contain his rage.

"A shrewd guess!" Yagustynka jeered; "why, to know whose it is, you need only to see the tail!"

"And by what right have ye dared to slaughter it?" he cried indignantly.

"No shouting, please. This is not a tavern.—By what right? Because Antek sent me word by Roch to kill it."

"And who is Antek to give orders here? Is the beast his?"

"Most surely," she replied: her fear had gone from her now.

"No, it is ours!—For what ye have done, ye shall pay dear."

"In this matter I am not answerable to you!"

"No?—To whom then?"

"Peace! and hold your tongue. Here lies the sick man to whom it belongs."

"Which you, not he, will eat!"

"But you, at any rate, shall not so much as smell it!"

"Give me," he said, changing his tone, "one-half of the carcass. Ye would not have me raise the devil, would ye?"

"Not one trotter of it shall you have on compulsion!"

"Then let me have a quarter—and a flitch thrown in—of your own free will."

"I will, if Antek orders me. Else you shall not get one bone."

"Antek! Antek!" he cried, again roused to fury. "Is it Antek's, then? Are you raving?"

"It is Father's," she said firmly, "but Antek is now in his place and disposes of all. Later, it shall be whose our Lord may will it to be."

"Let him dispose in jail of what he has! If he likes hus-



bandry, he may play the husbandman down in Siberia, where he is to go!" he shrieked, foaming at the mouth.

"He may go thither," she retorted fiercely, though fear for Antek was stabbing at her heart; "but were you yet a greater Judas than you are, you would not gain one inch of land thereby."

The smith's feet were shuffling on the floor with excitement, and his hands closing on his capote convulsively, so strong a craving he felt to clutch her by the throat. But he still mastered himself: he was not alone. She had no longer any fear at all: wielding the knife she used to cut the strips of flesh, she looked on the man with quiet scorn. After a time he sat down, lit a cigarette, and gazed about the room with red-rimmed eyes, revolving something in his mind. Presently he got up, and spoke to her calmly.

"Come round to the other side of the hut; we may yet find something to agree upon."

Wiping her hands, she went out of the room, but left the door ajar.

"I wish not only not to go to law, but not even to quarrel," he began, puffing at his cigarette.

"Because it will not serve," she retorted.

"Did Father-in-law say aught to you yesternight?"

The smith was by now quite friendly and smiling.

"Oh, no; he lay as still as he lies now." Full of suspicion, she was on her guard to divulge nothing.

"That pig is but a small matter; let us trouble no longer about it. Cut it up . . . eat it up by yourselves, just as you please: no very great loss for me.—One often says things of which one repents afterwards.—Pray forget what I said.—I want to speak of something more important. You ought to know that they talk in the village of cash—large sums—concealed within this hut. . . ." He paused and fixed his piercing eyes upon her face. "Now 'twere well worth while to seek for it, lest, should he die (which God forbid!), it might be mislaid, or fall into some stranger's hand."

"But will he say where he has hidden it?"

"To you he might, would you but draw him out with cunning words."

"Well, I will do my best; but he must first come to his wits again."

"And if ye keep it secret, and we find the money, then we might share and share alike. Nay, if the sum were large enough, a part might serve to set Antek free. Let no one else know of it: why should any know? Yagna's deed of gift makes her quite rich enough; we might even go to law, and have it annulled.—As to Gregory, think how much he has received during his service in the army!" He approached her more closely.

"You are right . . . quite, quite right," she stammered, struggling hard to give him no inkling of the secret she knew.

"I think he must have concealed it somewhere about the cabin; what think ye?"

"How should I know? He never spoke a word to me about that."

"But he said something yesternight . . . something about corn, I think?" the smith suggested.

"Aye. He said it was to be sown."

"About barrels too, did he not?" he persisted, looking her intently in the face.

"Of course. The seed-corn that's in the barrels," she made answer, apparently not making out to what those questions were tending.

He cursed silently, with bitter disappointment. And yet he felt more and more that she must be privy to the secret. Her face was so stiffly set, her eyes so carefully deprived of expression.

"Tell no one this thing I confide to you."

"Am I such a tale-bearer and everlasting gossip?"

"Well, well, I only caution you.—Now give good heed. The old man has had a glimmer already: his wits may quite come back to him any day."

"God grant it be soon!"



His glance lingered over her. At length, pulling at his moustache, he left her to herself and went out, she following him the while with a contemptuous look.

"A Judas, a traitor, and a thief!"

Exploding with hate, she took a few steps after him.—It was not for the first time that he had flourished before her eyes the awful possibility of Siberia's mines and Antek working in them, fettered to a wheelbarrow!

Not that she believed implicitly all he said; she knew that he spoke out of spite and to make her afraid, so as to get the most he could out of her by bullying.

Nevertheless, she was in great dread, and had carefully sought to be informed what Antek's punishment might be: she had no hope that he would be acquitted.

True, he had acted in defence of his father; but there must be some punishment for the death of the forester. There must!

Such was the opinion of all the more intelligent folk. She had been to consult a lawyer in the town, with a letter from his Reverence to introduce her. He had explained that the penalty might be either very heavy or very light; that patience and money spent without grudging were absolutely requisite here. But she was most terrified by the village people, who shared the blacksmith's view of things.

The words he had now spoken had therefore oppressed her most cruelly. She went on with her work, but felt almost unable to stand; and conversation was impossible. Moreover, when the smith had gone away, his wife came to tend the sick man, drive away the flies (there were none!), and certainly spy over all she did.

Magda, however, was soon tired of the task, and offered to help her in the work. But Hanka replied:

"Do not trouble, we can do all by ourselves: have you not work enough in your house?"

Her tone was so decided that Magda gave up the attempt, and only tried at times to join timidly in the talk, being by nature a shy and reticent woman.

But that same evening, who should make her appearance once more but Yagna, in her mother's company!

They greeted her as if on excellent terms, and in so friendly and flattering a way that Hanka, touched by their kindness, answered them in like manner, sparing neither pleasant speeches nor vodka, though she kept on the watch nevertheless. But Dominikova put the glass away from her.

"What! in the Holy Week? How could I drink vodka at such a time?"

Hanka maintained that it was no sin to drink even then, on such an occasion and in one's own house.

"Ah!" groaned Dominikova, "one is always but too ready to find an excuse to let oneself go, and enjoy pleasure!"

"Mistress, drink to me," Ambrose exclaimed; "I have not an organist's scruples."

"To you the very sound of glasses when they clink is a temptation," Dominikova grumbled, as she set to work at the sick man's bandages.

"Poor creature!" she cried in pity; "lying there insensible, with all God's world lost to him!"

"And not to taste sausage or vodka again for ever!" Yagustynka chimed in, turning the pity into a gibe.

Dominikova rebuked her tartly: "You laugh at everything, you!"

"Shall weeping lessen my pain? My laughter is all my fortune."

Ambrose remarked: "Let those only that have sown evil garner in sorrow, and atone for it by penance!" This was a shrewd hit at Dominikova, who retorted, glaring on him sternly:

"They say truly that Ambrose, though he serves in church, curries favour with sin in order to enjoy the good things of this life!" And she added, lowering her tone threateningly: "But he alone will turn away from the good and befriend the wicked, who considereth not the punishment which he shall receive hereafter!"

Silence fell upon all. Ambrose worked on, though surly.



He had a sharp retort ready, but kept it back, knowing well that anything he said would be reported to his Reverence the next day, and after Mass at latest: it was to some purpose that the old dame was such a church-goer. Everyone, besides, shrank from the fixed gaze of those owlsh eyes of hers; even Yagustynka, the defiant, was overawed and quailed before her.

Yes, and so did all the village. More than one had experienced the power of those evil eyes; more than one, on whom she had laid a spell, now groaned with twisted limbs, or in the clutch of some dire disease!

They worked on then, with bowed heads: only her face, rugged, withered, and white as bleached wax, was seen towering amongst them in the room. She too remained silent, along with Yagna; but they were both so active and diligent that Hanka had not the heart to refuse the aid they were giving.

But after Ambrose had left, called away to church by the priest's servant, they remained alone, diligently packing flitches and pork into the tubs and barrels.

"The meat will be cooler in the larder that's on this side, for the fire here is much smaller," the old dame decided, rolling the vessels in there at once, with the help of Yagna.

All this was done so quickly that they were put in the larder before Hanka had time even to protest. She was extremely mortified, and, immediately calling Pete and Yuzka to her aid, carried over to her own side all that remained.

At dusk and by lamplight they set to making sausages, blood-puddings, and brawn. Hanka, whose annoyance had not passed away, sat mincing the materials with a sort of dark rage.

"Leave the things here, for her to eat or steal? Not I!— . . . But oh, the cunning hag!" she hissed through her clenched teeth.

"To-morrow morning, when she has gone to church, you can carry everything out into your own larder without noise or fuss. Surely she will not break in and take it back by

force!" Such was the advice of Yagustynka, as she pressed the ingredients of the sausages into the long dried guts, writhing upon the table like serpents, and every now and then hung them up to be smoked in the chimney.

"Ah! the stroke was planned between them, and they came on purpose for that!"

She was exasperated.

"The sausages will all be made ere Ambrose be back here," the old woman observed.

Hanka would speak no more, absorbed in work, and in planning how to get the hams and flitches into her possession again.

The fire crackled on the hearth with a lively flame; the whole room was in a glow, and the various ingredients of the blood-puddings were bubbling in several cauldrons.

"O Lord! my mouth waters at the very smell!" sighed Vitek, sniffing greedily.

"Do not stand sniffing here, or I will know why!" cried Hanka. "Give the kine to drink, fill the mangers with hay, and put straw under them. 'Tis late already . . . when will you have done it all?"

"Pete is coming; I cannot do all by myself."

"And whither has he gone?"

"What, know ye not? He is helping them to put things in order on the other side."

"Oho!—Hey, you, Pete!" she cried, calling out into the passage. "See to the cattle for the night—at once!"

Her tone, as she gave that order, had been such that the man came out instantly into the yard.

"Let her stir herself and clean her own room at least! Look at her, that grand lady—will not soil her hands—must needs employ a manservant!" So said Hanka, in a towering passion, whilst pouring out a steaming potful of liver and chitterlings. The sound of a bell and a cart clattering by outside gave another turn to her thoughts.

It was the priest, carrying the Holy Viaticum to someone, as her father, old Bylitsa, who then came in, told her.

"But who can it be? No one was ill, so far as I know."



"He has passed the Voyt's cabin!" Vitek, out of breath, came shouting outside the window.

"To one of the *Komorniki*? I think not."

"Perhaps to your people, the Prycheks, Yagustynka; they live that way."

"Ah, nothing ever was the matter with them, the miscreants; no evil ever comes nigh them!" she said, in a faltering voice: though constantly at odds with her children, she felt a quiver of anxiety.

"I'll see how matters stand and return at once." And she hurried out.

But the evening dragged on, and yet she was not back.—Ambrose, who had returned, said the priest had been called in to Agata, a kinswoman of the Klembas: she had come back from begging only the Saturday before.

"But how is that? Is she not at the Klembas'?"

"No; she has removed to die: either at Koziol's or at the Prycheks'."

There was no more talk then, for there was much work to get through, especially as both Yuzka and Hanka were often obliged to leave it for the byre or the stable.

It was dark outside, and irksome within.

A chilly rain was pelting, and the wind lashed the walls, whistled through the orchards, made the trees rustle and murmur, and sometimes blew down the chimneys, scattering fire-brands about.

It was hard upon midnight when all the work was over—and Yagustynka had not yet returned.

"In such foul weather, she must have been loath to grope her way back!" Hanka thought, while she patrolled the premises before going to bed.

Truly, it had been a pity to turn a dog out of doors on such a night! The roof creaked with the wild blasts; all over the sky, brown masses of rain-clouds were pouring down their heavy burden of water; and nowhere on high was there the least twinkle of starlight. Everybody else had long ago gone to sleep; the wind danced and revelled in the fields, and swept great sheets of water from off the pond.

So they waited no longer for her, but went to bed.

She appeared the next morning, but as louring and sullen as the swampy miry day itself. She just warmed her hands at the cabin fire, and then made for the granary, to pick out seed-potatoes from the heap which had been dumped down on the threshing-floor.

She was mostly alone at that work, Yuzka having to go and scatter the dung which Pete had been carting since day-break. Having been soundly rated by Hanka for sloth on the day before, he now, to make amends, stormed at Vitek, flogged the horses furiously, and made them splash through the mud at full speed.

"The rascal!" muttered the old woman. "To punish the horses because he himself was lazy!"

When Yuzka spoke to her, she gave her no answer, but sat gloomily, hiding her eyes red with tears under the apron she had thrown over her head.

Hanka looked in, but only once. She was waiting for Yagna to come out, that she might have an opportunity both to take the meat over to her own side, and to examine the corn-barrels. But, as if of set purpose, Yagna never left the hut.

Impatient, Hanka at last went in to see Boryna, and then—apparently seeking for something—she entered the larder.

"Whatever ye want I can find for you!" Yagna exclaimed, and, seeing her go in, followed before she had done more than plunge her hand into the corn.—Fruitlessly; but the money might be lying quite at the bottom. She left the place; and, certain that Yagna was on the watch, resolved to put off the attempt to a more convenient season.

"And now for the gifts we must make," she thought, looking sorrowfully at the sausages that dangled in a row from a horizontal pole. Boryna and all the foremost husbandmen were in the habit, whenever they killed a pig, to send their next relations and best friends a sausage, or some other dainty bit.

"'Tis hard, in truth; but you can do no otherwise, or they



would say you grudge them," Bylitsa advised her, guessing aright what was in her thoughts.

In spite, then, of the temptation to shirk that duty, she put the intended presents on a number of plates and dishes, now substituting a larger for a smaller piece, now the reverse, now adding, now taking away a blood-pudding . . . and so on: until she had done, and, dejected and weary, called for Yuzka.

"Put on your best garments, and take these things round."

"O Lord! what a quantity of meat is here!"

"What can I do? I must give it away. We have to live with folk.—'Jack his flail can whisk alone, but not dance and frisk alone.'—This big piece take to Uncle's wife. She hates and rates me; but there's no help for it.—This to the Voyt: a rascal, but on good terms with Matthias, and (it may be) serviceable one day.—For Magda and her smith, a whole blood-pudding, a sausage, and a piece of bacon. They shall not say we have eaten Father's pig by ourselves. Talk against us they will, of course, but less.—This sausage is for Prychkova. She's saucy, bitter of tongue, but one of our best friends.—And this last piece for Klembova."

"Shall Dominikova get naught?"

"Later in the afternoon. Of course she shall. She's to be dealt with as filth: with care and from afar. . . . Now take these things round separately, and waste no time in talk with other girls, for there is work at home for you."

"Do give Nastka something: they are all so poor!" Yuzka said beseechingly. "They have scarce wherewith to buy salt!"

"Let her come: she shall get something.—Father, take this to Veronka; she was to have looked in yesterday."

"She had to clean the miller's cabin in the afternoon; they are expecting visitors."

Hanka, having sent Yuzka off, and put on a warmer dress, ran out to see that the lads worked properly, and to assist Yagustynka.

To the old woman, now so strangely reticent, she said: "We hoped you would come back for supper."

"What I saw was supper enough for me—and it lies on my stomach yet."

"It was Agata, I believe?"

"Yes, poor thing! Passing away . . . and in Koziol's hut!"

"Why is she not at the Klembas'?"

"Because those folk, as long as a kinsman asks for naught, or comes full-handed, allow him to claim kindred; but would set their dogs on any other, how near soever!"

"What say you? Surely they have not driven her out?"

"Well, she came to them on Saturday, and was taken with a sickness that same night. . . . They say that Klembova took away her feather-bed, and turned her out almost naked."

"Klembova? Can it be? So good a woman!—Nay, it must be a slander."

"I invent naught, and tell you only what mine ears have heard."

"At Koziol's too! Who would have thought the woman so merciful?"

"For ready money—'tis strange, but true—even a priest will be kind to you!—Koziol's wife has got a score of *złoty* out of Agata in cash. For that sum she will keep her till she drops off—which she expects to do any day. . . . Funeral extra, of course.—She will give up the ghost one of these days: there will be no long waiting, oh, no!"

She broke down, unable to choke down a sob.

"What ails you, my dear?" Hanka asked, in a kindly tone.

"I have supped full of human woes, and have eaten over measure! One's heart is not a stone; one tries to harden it by churlishness towards everyone; but it will not do. And there comes a time when it can bear no more, and crumbles away to sand with the pain of it!"

She burst into a tempest of tears, shaking all over; but, after a time, went on speaking, but with such heat and bitterness that the words burned into Hanka's tender heart.

"And to this desolation there is no end—none! When the priest left Agata, I stayed by her side. Then there came



one from over the water—Philip's wife—crying out that her eldest daughter was a-dying. . . . Away I hurried to her.—Lord, what a hut! as cold as ice itself! Window-panes gone, wisps of straw instead. Only one bed: the others sleep on litter, like kennelled dogs.—Aye, the girl is dying, but of what? Of hunger! Their last potato is eaten, their feather-bed sold: every litre of groats is got from the miller by begging, for no one will lend aught to tide things over till harvest. Who could pay? Philip is in jail with the rest of them.—Scarcely had I left these, when Gregory's wife told me that Florka Prychkova had been brought to bed and was in want of aid. . . . Vile wretches they are, and have defrauded me: but I went notwithstanding. In their hut, too, misery shows her teeth! Lots of children—Florka abed—not a kopek of savings—and no help from anywhither. True, the land is theirs: but can they eat it?—No one to cook for them. . . . And their land is untilled, for Adam, her goodman, is in prison likewise.—A son has been born to her—a strong lusty little fellow—but will he get food to live? Florka is thin as a lath—not one drop of milk can she give him; and their cow has but just calved. All is for the worst everywhere. No one to work, and no work to be got; and neither money nor help from any quarter. . . . Oh, would that our Lord might send all these poorest folk a merciful death! They would not then suffer so!”

“Has anyone in the village aught to spare?” said Hanka. “All are poor, and the cry of misery is heard everywhere.”

“‘Who has no goodwill shirks his duty still.’—I do not say this to you; the farm is not yours, and I know well what ye have to undergo. But there be those who might do something: the miller—the priest—the organist—and many others.”

“Perhaps they would, if they were but told of all,” Hanka said, taking their part.

“He that has a kindly heart needs no telling, and finds it out by himself. My dear, they are well aware of what the poor have to endure: it is on their very poverty that they thrive and grow fat. Why, 'tis now the miller's harvest-

home, when folk are crowding round him for flour and groats, giving up their last mite to him, or taking loans at high interest, to be paid in future work: money for food must be found, even should one be forced to sell one's bed to the Jew!"

"Indeed, no one is willing to give things gratis," Hanka said with a heavy sigh, as the memory of her recent past surged up.

"I sat with Florka for a long time," Yagustynka went on to say; "and many women came in, telling us what was going on in Lipka. They said——"

"Mercy on us!" Hanka suddenly exclaimed, starting to her feet. A gust had just blown the door in, so violently as almost to wrench it off its hinges. And she had closed it with such care, and placed stakes to prop it up against the wind!

"With such a gale as this, I fear there will soon be more rain."

"As it is, the carts afield already sink axle-deep in mire!"

"But with a few days of warm sun, the ground will soon be dry again: 'tis spring."

"Ah, if we could but begin to plant potatoes ere Easter-tide!"

So they went on talking, busy with their work, and the potatoes drummed upon the floor continuously: those too small thrown on to one heap, and the damaged ones on to another.

"These will fatten your sow, and the kine will drink the boiled water."

But Hanka was scarcely listening, pondering how to get at her father-in-law's money. At times she looked out through the open door at the trees, waving and wrestling with the blasts, that were cold and damp, and pungent with the smell of the dunghill close by. The farm-yard was empty, save for a few fowls running about with ruffled feathers. The geese all sat in a corner close to the hedge, and gathered their chuckling little ones under their wings. Now and again Pete came in, driving his empty wagon, and slapping his arms against his sides; then, giving the horses a bundle of hay,



and (Vitek aiding) filling the cart with dung, he pushed it on over the ruts and holes, and drove away into the fields once more.

Many a time, too, did Yuzka hurry in, loud-voiced, blowzed, breathless, on her way to somebody's cabin with presents, and chattering all the way as she came and went.

Unquestioned, she talked and talked, and was presently seen starting again, bearing a dish carefully wrapped up in a napkin.

"A chatterbox that girl is, but no fool," Yagustynka observed.

"No fool, indeed; only she has naught in her head but mischief and games."

"What would you have? Such a tiny thing!"

"Vitek!" Hanka cried on a sudden. "Someone has entered the cabin. See who it is."

"'Tis the blacksmith, just come in."

A misgiving took hold of her, and she went straightway to her father's side, where he was lying—on his back, as usual—while Yagna sewed at the window. No one else was there.

"What has become of Michael?"

"Somewhere about, seeking a key he lent to Matthias not long ago," she explained, without looking Hanka in the face.

The latter went into the passage, into her own room, where Bylitsa was sitting with the children by the fire, and making them little toy windmills—even into the farm-yard buildings: he was nowhere in sight. Then back she darted straight to the larder on her father's side, though the door was shut.

And there she saw the blacksmith, standing beside a corn-barrel, with his arms buried in the corn up to the elbows, and seeking something there with might and main!

"What!" she cried with a gasp; "your key is hidden in the corn, is it?" And she placed herself in front of him with a threatening air.

"No . . . I am seeing . . . whether it is not mildewed . . . and whether it will do for seed-corn," he said, stuttering, taken quite by surprise.

"What business of yours is that? Say, what brings you in here?" she cried.

Unwillingly, he drew his arms out, and muttered with ill-concealed anger:

"Ye spy upon me as if I were a thief!"

"How should I know what business brings you in here? Here's a fellow who enters other people's premises: why? I find him groping in the corn-barrels: why should he not also wrench the padlocks off, or break open the chests?" Her voice was rising to a scream.

"Did I not tell you yesterday what we have to look for?" he answered, striving to be calm.

"What ye said was all a blind. You sought to throw dust in my eyes, while you were after something else. But I saw through your plotting, you traitor, you!"

"Hanka!" he shrieked, to terrify her; "stop that talk, or I will stop your mouth!"

"Would ye? Lay but a finger on me, and I'll raise such an outcry that half the village will be here in a trice, to learn what sort of a jail-bird you are!"

As she uttered the threat, he cast one more glance around; then, with a blasphemous oath, he left the room; exchanging with her, as he did so, looks that—had it been possible—would have stabbed to the very heart.

Hanka's outbreak had completely upset her, but a cup of water presently brought her round again.

"It must be found!—And also concealed in a safe place: for what money soever that man finds, he will make off with," was her mental comment, going back to the granary. But, half-way there, she stopped and went back to the cottage. Opening the door, she apostrophized Yagna thus:

"You who sit here in the cabin to watch over it, how do you let a stranger enter the inmost room?"

Yagna answered scornfully: "Michael is not a stranger: he has as much right in there as you have."

"A dog barks, and you lie! Ye two are in league together; but mark well what I say.—If aught disappear from the cottage, then, as sure as there's a God in heaven, I'll bring ac-



tion and denounce you as his accomplice. Remember that!" she screamed, infuriated.

Yagna, snatching the first weapon at hand, leaped from her seat.

"Would you fight me? Do but try: I'll tear the beauty off your dainty face, and paint it such a scarlet that your own mother shall not know you!"

And she went on upbraiding and vilifying her to the fullest powers of her voice and of her enmity.

How this might have ended cannot be guessed. They were about to close with each other, when Roch happened to come in. This brought Hanka to her senses in so far that she spoke no more. But she rushed from the room, and the door slammed like thunder behind her.

Yagna remained still for some time, her bosom palpitating, her lips trembling like one with the ague. At length, flinging into a corner the small hand-mangle she had clutched, she threw herself upon the bed, and gave way to an uncontrollable burst of pitiful wailing.

Meanwhile, Hanka, on her side of the house, was telling Roch what had taken place. He listened patiently to her tale; but it was so incoherent and broken with sobs that he could scarcely make out a word, and rebuked her very severely. Putting aside the food she had set before him, he reached out for his cap, in great indignation.

"I am going away, never to set eyes on Lipka again, since ye behave thus! Oh, how all this must rejoice the Evil One, aye, and those Jews who make a mock at us Christians, calling us brawling idiots! O merciful Jesus! was there too little of distress and sickness and starvation, that, to crown all, women must also fly at one another!"

He stood panting after this appeal; and Hanka, seized with contrition and dread lest he should leave them in anger, kissed his hand and earnestly begged for pardon.

"Ah!" she added, "if ye but knew how hard it is to dwell with her! She does everything to spite and injure me. . . . Her very being here is a wrong done to us all! . . . So many an acre of land made over to her! . . . And then—know ye

not what manner of woman she is? and what she does with young men?" (No, it was beyond her power to bring in Antek's name.) "And now," she added with bated breath, "they say that she is sinning with the Voyt!—Therefore, when I behold her, all within me seethes with hatred, even to slaying!"

"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord! She too is human, and she feels it, if any do her wrong. And for her sins she must some day suffer heavy chastisement. I tell you, then, do no wrong to her."

"What! have I wronged her in aught?"

She stood amazed, unable to conceive in what way Yagna could have suffered wrong at her hands.

Roch ate a morsel of bread, looking out into vacancy meanwhile, and thinking deeply. At last he departed, after having patted the heads of the little ones that came to his knees.

"One of these days, I shall look in again at eventide. But now I say to you only this: Let her alone, do your duty, and our Lord will see to all the rest."



## CHAPTER IV

**R**OCH, grieving bitterly over all the evil in the village, walked slowly on along the shores of the pond. Yes, things were so bad in Lipka that they could not possibly be worse.

That diseases prevailed; that some died of starvation; that quarrels and fighting were rife amongst them; and that death was now taking a heavier toll than in preceding years: all that was not the very worst. To such things the people were accustomed, and bowed to them as to the inevitable. The worst of all was this: that the fields lay untilled, there being no one to till them.

The spring had come, with all her train of birds, now returning to their last year's nests; the fields were drying on the uplands, the waters draining away everywhere; and the land simply cried out to be ploughed, and manured, and blessed with the sacred blessing which the sower gives.

But who could go afield? All had gone to prison. Only women remained, with neither vigour of arm nor of brain to do things aright.

Moreover, for some of them the time of childbirth had arrived, as is usual in spring; and cows were calving, fowls hatching, swine farrowing. Then it was the season to sow and plant the gardens. Potatoes awaited selection, dung had to be carted, water drawn off from the fields. Without men to help, they could never do all that, even should they wear their arms to stumps. And besides, feeding and watering cattle, cutting straw for fodder, chopping up fuel or bringing it in from the forest, and a thousand other duties (such, for instance, as caring for the innumerable children running about everywhere)—ah, well! it was wearing toil, O Lord! and in the evening one's bones and loins ached grievously, and not half the work done!

And the land lay there, expectant. Warmed by the sun, dried by the breezes, drinking in the soft fertilizing rains and the sweet influence of those spring nights, it began to teem with green blades of thick grass, and wheat swiftly sprouting. Larks trilled over the plains, and storks wandered in the wet meadows, and many a flower in the marshes now raised its head towards the shining sky; that sky which daily, like a beautiful tent spread out above them, seemed to rise higher and farther from the earth. And now their longing eyes could distinguish far away the sharp outlines of woods and hamlets, never visible in the dusky days of winter; and the whole country-side, awaking as out of a death-trance, arrayed itself joyfully like a bride for her wedding-day.

Everywhere around Lipka, as far as the eye could see, men were hard at work. Whether in fair or in rainy weather, the air thrilled with merry songs, ploughs glittered athwart the fields, men were trudging, horses neighing, wagons rumbling blithely. Only the fields of Lipka lay waste and silent, like a vast mournful burial-ground.

Over and above all this, anxiety for the dear ones in prison tortured them.

Hardly a day passed by without several people trudging to town, bearing bundles of food on their backs for the captives, and vain requests that they, being innocent, should be set free.

In short, the state of the village was deplorable; and the men of the vicinity now began to see that the injury done to their neighbours was also done to the whole peasant class. "Only apes are foes to apes," they said; "we, who are men, ought to stand up for our brethren, lest the same fate befall us likewise."

So it came to pass that the other villagers, who had formerly quarrelled with the men of Lipka over territorial limits and matters of like nature, or out of envy, because these had set themselves above their neighbours and claimed superiority over them—now set aside all such bickerings, and often came to Lipka in secret to ascertain the truth of the



matter: some from Rudki, others from Volka or Debitsa, or even men who were of the "nobility" of Rzepki.

The day before, when they came for their Easter confession, they had inquired diligently about the prisoners, and their faces had set fiercely, while they heard; and they broke out into curses on the injustice done, and pitied the people that had suffered so much.

Roch was thinking of this event, and pondering over a certain important step to take, frequently stopping to shelter himself against the wind, with a far-off look in his eyes.

It was brighter and warmer now, but the wind increased steadily, and roared all over the country. It made some of the slenderer saplings bow deeply, sighing and lashing the pond with their whip-like boughs; it tore off fragments of thatch from the roofs, snapped the brittle boughs, and swept overhead with such violence that everything seemed in motion and tossing about: orchards, palings, cabins, solitary trees—all, as it were, moved along with it; nay, even the pallid sun itself, emerging now and then from the scudding clouds, appeared fleeing precipitately through the sky. And over the church a flock of wild birds, with outspread wings, sailed down the wind, unable to make head against its might.

Yet, notwithstanding the harm it did, it did also great service in drying the lands, which ever since morning were taking a lighter tinge, while it swept the roads clear of water.

Roch was roused from the thoughts which absorbed him so deeply, by the sound of quarrelling voices. He hastily drew near.

One quick glance showed him a large crowd of women, in red petticoats, surrounding a group of men on the farther side of the pond, in front of the hut where the Soltys lived and in all the enclosures thereabouts.

He went forward quickly, eager to know what was the matter; but, recognizing the men for a company of gendarmes along with the Voyt, he turned off into the nearest enclosures, whence he drew nigh the throng, creeping cautiously from orchard to orchard; for somehow he objected to meeting the eyes of the police.

The tumult increased. Women were in the majority; children, too, had flocked there from every side, edging in amongst their elders, pushing and elbowing one another, overflowing the enclosures and pouring out into the roads, with little heed either of the deep mud or of the lashing boughs. All were babbling together; sometimes one voice rose above another, but there was no making out what was said; the gale was too high. Looking through the trees, Roch could perceive only that Ploshkova headed them all: a big fat crimson-faced woman, who cried out louder than anyone else and, shaking her fist furiously under the Voyt's very nose, made him shrink back, while the others screamed their approval, like a flock of offended turkeys. The wife of Kobus also was there, on the skirts of the crowd, vainly striving to get at the gendarmes, against whom many a fist was shaken, and here and there a stick or dirty broom.

The Voyt, sorely embarrassed, was trying to appease them and scratching his head, while drawing the women's onslaught on to himself, so that the gendarmes cunningly managed to extricate themselves from the throng, and retired in the direction of the mill. The Voyt, following in the rear, continued to answer them back and threaten the boys who had begun to pelt him with mud.

"What do they want?" Roch asked of the assembled women.

"They would have our village supply them with twenty wagons, horses and men, for road-mending in the forest!" Ploshkova told him.

"Some big official is to pass this way, and they want to get the holes in the road filled up."

"Neither wagons nor horses nor men! we have said."

"Who is here that can drive?"

"Let them set our lads free first: then we shall think about the roads!"

"The Squire! let them put him to a wagon!"

"Or set to work themselves, and keep their snouts out of our cabins."



"Ah! the hounds, the carrions, the scurvy knaves!" many voices shouted at once, in a rising chorus.

"All the morning they have been with the Voyt, laying their heads together in the tavern."

"Aye, aye, drinking vodka, and then going round to every hut for labourers!"

"But the Voyt knows the state of affairs perfectly well," said Roch, vainly attempting to make himself heard in the tumult. "He ought to have explained matters at the Bureau."

"He! He is the best friend of our enemies!"

"He only cares to get money!" they all shouted again.

"Yes, he advised us to give them a score of eggs, or a fowl per hut: then they would let us alone, and press men to work from the other villages."

"A score of stones for him rather!"

"Peace, good woman; ye might smart for contempt of an official."

"I don't care. Let them take me to jail. I'll stand up to the very biggest official and tell him what injustice we have to bear."

"Afraid of the Voyt? What, I?" Ploshkova cried. "The tainted wretch! I fear a scarecrow as much as him! He forgets that 'tis we that have made him Voyt, and what we have made we can unmake."

"He would punish us, would he? Do we not pay taxes, send our boys to the army, do whatever they tell us? Is it too little for them that they have taken our men from our midst?"

"Whenever they show their faces, some evil attends them."

"They shot my dog in the fields last harvest-time!"

"They had me before the court, because my chimney took fire!"

"And what a flogging they gave young Gulbas for flinging a stone at them!"

All were crowding around Roch and shouting together. He cried out:

"Can screaming serve your turn? Be quiet!"

"Then go ye to the Voyt and lay the matter before him!" Kobusova the fiery suggested.

"Else we go thither—and our brooms with us!"

"Go I will; but only after you have dispersed. Now, pray, off with you: each has so much to do at home!—I shall lay the matter before him fitly." He spoke very earnestly, fearing lest the gendarmes might return.

The noonday Angelus was sounding from the belfry. They slowly left the place to talk things over in eager excitement, standing in knots outside their cabins.

Roch went hurriedly to the Soltys, at whose house he was then dwelling, as he taught the children in the empty cabin of the Sikoras, down beyond the tavern, at the other end of the village. But the Soltys was not at home, having driven over to the district town with tax-payments.

Soha's wife told him of all that had happened, but in a quiet subdued manner, and wound up by saying:

"God grant that no harm may come of these disturbances!"

"'Tis the Voyt's fault. The gendarmes only do as they are bid. But he is well aware that there are, so to say, only women left in the village, and that they have no one to work on their own fields, let alone working for the government. I shall go and get him to arrange matters, so that no fines be imposed."

"It looks very much like revenge taken for the forest business," she remarked.

"Taken by whom?—by the Squire? My good dame, what has he to do with the Administration?"

"Gentlefolk always agree better with gentlefolk, and are hand in glove with each other. Besides, he said he would be even with the Lipka folk."

"Good God! not a single day of peace—always some fresh affliction coming upon us!"

"May nothing worse than this befall us, I pray God!" she answered, clasping her hands in supplication.

"They were all screaming together like a flock of magpies, and, Lord protect us! how they gabbled!"



"He that itches will scratch!"

"But it can do no good, and may bring still greater harm!"

He was sorely agitated and apprehensive of some yet greater impending evil.

"Are ye," she asked, "returning to the little ones?"

He had risen from his seat.

"I have sent them home. Easter holidays have come, and besides, they will be wanted in the house, where so much is to be done."

"I went this morning to hire labourers in Vola, offering three *zloty* a day and their board, but could get no one. Everyone wants to plough his own fields first. They promised to come, but only in a week or two."

"My God!" he said, heaving a sigh; "one man has only a couple of arms: what can he do?"

"Ah, but ye are of use to the folk, and of no little use. Were it not for your wise head and kind heart, I cannot tell what would become of us."

"Could I do all I long to do, there would be an end of suffering on earth!"

He threw out his arms with a gesture of pained helplessness, and hastened away to the Voyt's dwelling. But it was long before he got there; cottage after cottage attracted him.

The village had somewhat quieted down. Some of the more excitable women were still loud in talk outside their cabins, but the greater part had gone to cook the dinner. Only the wind howled along the roads and swept through the trees as heretofore.

But presently, dinner over, and the gale notwithstanding, the whole place was swarming with folk, and an increasing clatter of women's tongues resounded about the gardens, in every part of the farm-yards, before the huts, in the passages and in the rooms they led to. For only women and lasses were toiling there; of males, there were only little boys.

They were all the more feverishly earnest in their work because the day before had been a sort of half-holiday, with

the confessions to the priests who had come; and the morning had been lost because of the gendarmes.

Easter was near, Holy Tuesday had come already, and so much still to be done! A spring cleaning was necessary, clothes had to be made for the children, and in some cases for the grown-ups too; and corn required to be ground, and the Hallow-fare to be got ready! In every cottage the good-wives' brains were whirling to find out how all this was to be accomplished. Most carefully did they look through their store-rooms for anything to be either sold to the tavern-keeper or taken over to town to get the needful funds. Several women even drove off at once after dinner, with saleables under the litter in their carts.

"I hope no tree may fall on you by the way!" Roch said warningly to Gulbas' wife, who had such a wretched jade to her cart that it scarcely made any headway against the wind.

And with that he entered her farm-yard, where the girls, who had been trying to plaster up the chinks, could reach no higher than the tops of the windows. In that work he helped them, made some slaked lime in a tub for the white-wash, and a sort of straw brush to lay it on.

Then he walked on to Vahnik's, where the lasses were carting dung, but so clumsily that half of it fell out into the road, while they pulled the unruly horse along by the bridle. Up came Roch, shovelled the dung into the cart, set all to rights there, and whipped the horse into obedience.

Farther, at Balcerek's, there was Mary, held to be (barring Yagna Borynova) the comeliest girl in the village, sowing peas in black and highly manured soil close to the hedge-row. But she wriggled about like a fly caught in resin, her kerchief twisted round her head, and her father's capote put on over her petticoat to protect it, and trailing on the ground.

"No need to hasten so; you have plenty of time!" he said, smiling, as he drew near.

"Why, know ye not, 'If peas be on Holy Tuesday sown, each gallon will give you a bushel when grown'?" she cried in response.



"Ere your sowing be ended, those first sown will be out. But, Mary! ye cast the seed too thick; when they come up, they will lie in a tangle on the ground."

And he taught her how to sow as the wind blew; the silly girl had never thought of making the peas drop equally everywhere.

"Vavrek Soha had told me you were a handy lass," he remarked casually, as it were, while retracing his steps along the miry furrow.

"Have ye spoken with him?" she asked, stopping in her work, and suddenly out of breath.

She had flushed a dark crimson, but was ashamed to repeat her question.

Roch's only answer was a smile; but, as he left her, he said: "At Eastertide I shall tell him with what a will you work."

Again, on the lands of the Ploshka, a couple of little boys were at work on a potato-field hard by the road. One drove, the other meant to plough. But as each of them hardly reached to the mare's tail, and had next to no strength at all, the plough zigzagged like a tipsy man, and the mare was ever and anon for going back to the stable. At which they both used the whip on her, and also bad language.

"We can manage, Roch, we can manage; 'tis only these nasty stones twist the plough awry, and the mare would fain go to the manger," the elder one blubbered, to excuse himself, when Roch took the handles and traced a straight furrow, teaching him meanwhile how to deal with the mare.

"But now," the boy cried boldly, "we shall have ploughed the whole field ere nightfall!" He peered round suspiciously, to see whether anyone had been witness to Roch's assistance; and when the old man had gone, he seated himself on the plough, turned away from the wind (as he had seen his father do), and lit a cigarette.

Roch went on, looking about him to help where help was required.

Silencing brawls, settling disputes, giving good advice, he also came in aid, however hard the work, whenever aid was

wanted. Klemba's wife could not chop up a hard knotty stump—he did it for her; Dominikova required water from the pond—he brought it; and, farther on, children were wayward, and he awed them into obedience.

A wise and pious man, and one who knew people as few did, he knew at one glance what to say and how to say it; how to drive away sadness with a merry tale; how to laugh with one, pray with another, and reprove a third with words of grave wisdom or stern warning.

So kind-hearted was he, so full of sympathy for all, that he would often and unasked spend many a night by a sick-bed: and to the sick he did so much good that they set him even above his Reverence.

In time, folk had begun to look upon him as one of God's saints, who always brought mercy and consolation to their lowly huts.

Alas! could he ward off all misery? Could he prevent all misfortune, feed all the hungry, heal all the sick, and alone supply the many hands they stood in need of?

For, indeed, the village was a large one. Of dwelling-houses alone there were hard on threescore, and a great expanse of cornland stretched round them; there was also much cattle, plenty of other live stock, and many a mouth to feed besides.

All this, since the men had been taken away, now lived mostly by God's providence alone; and so, as a matter of course, their troubles and needs, their complaints and murmurs, multiplied very much indeed.

This Roch had long known and realized; but it was only that day, when going from door to door through the village, that he saw how fearfully all had gone to rack and ruin.

That the fields now lay fallow, no one ploughing or sowing (for the little that they did was mere child's play), was but a lesser evil. Wherever you went, you could see the spread of gradual decay: fences knocked down, beams and rafters peeping through the torn thatches, gates wrenched from their hinges, hanging like broken wings, and flapping against the walls; and many a cabin, too, leaning much out of the



perpendicular, and sorely in need of beams to buttress it.

All about the huts were pools of stagnant water, or mud and filth up to the knees around the walls: which made walking no easy matter. At every step the desolation and downfall of the village was so evident that it made the heart bleed. In many a homestead, too, the kine would often low in vain for their fodder, and the horses, with no one to curry them, were caked and plastered with dung.

So it was everywhere. The very calves, with mud all over them, would wander alone about the roads; household utensils rotted in the rain, ploughs rusted away, sows farrowed in the wagon-baskets. When anything was warped or torn or broken, it remained as it was: who was there to set things to rights?

The women?—Why, they, poor things! had scarce time and strength to do what was most urgent. Ah! but if the men came back, then things would change in the twinkle of an eye!

And they therefore awaited their return as a great mercy of God, and, trusting in Him from day to day, possessed their souls—as well as they could—in patience.

Yet neither did the men return, nor was it possible to know when they would be set free.

Twilight was scattering greyness over the land, when Roch left the last hut beyond the church (that of the Golabs) and plodded over to meet the Voyt.

The gale had by no means abated, and fought with the trees so fiercely that walking was perilous: every now and then the broken limb of a tree would be hurled to the ground.

Stooping forward, the old man glided along by the fences, hardly visible through the eerie grey twilight, opaque as powdered glass.

"Are ye seeking the Voyt? He is not at home, but at the miller's," said Yagustynka, appearing unexpectedly.

He turned suddenly, and made for the mill; he could not bear that old mischief-maker.

She, however, following and walking fast at his side, said in a low whisper:

"Pray look in at the Prycheks'—and at Philip's too—I beg you."

"If I can be of any use . . ."

"They begged me so to ask you.—Pray visit them!"

"Good, but I must see the Voyt first."

"Thanks, and God bless you!"

He felt her lips tremble as she kissed his hand. He was amazed: she had usually been on skirmishing terms with him.

"To everyone," she said further, "there comes a time when, like a stray dog, driven away by all folk, one is glad to be caressed by some kindly hand." And ere he could find a word to reply, she hurried away.

He was told that the Voyt was no longer at the miller's, but had driven over to town with the gendarmes. And Franek ushered him into his own little room, where several people from Lipka and the neighbouring villages were sitting to have their corn ground. Roch would have waited there, but Tereska, the soldier's wife, who sat with the others, came to him timidly and in secret, to get news of Matthew Golab.

"Ye were with the prisoners, and must know, surely. Is he in good health and spirits? . . . When will they let him out?" She put these questions, however, with downcast eyes.

He looked at her with stern sorrow. "And your goodman in the army, how is he? Is he well? and like to come home soon?"

She blushed deeply and fled away into the mill.

He shook his head. "Poor blind creature!" he thought, and went after her. But the lamps were burning dimly in a dusky air, full of meal-dust, and he could not find where she had hidden herself from him. The mill went clattering on; the waters hurled themselves upon the wheels with such incessant din; the wind roared round the roof and walls, so like wheat pouring out of some enormous sack, that all was in a quiver, and, it seemed, about to fly to pieces. Roch then gave up the search, and went to see those poor people according to his promise.



Now the night had fallen; here and there lamps twinkled amongst the tossing trees like wolves' bright eyes. But, all around, it was strangely luminous; the huts were seen clear-cut in the distance; the sky hung aloft, bluish-black and cloudless, save for a few flying scuds like scattered snowflakes; and the stars oversprinkled it in ever denser multitudes, while the gale waxed mightier and mightier, and reigned over all the land.

So, all night long, it continued blowing. Few could close their eyes. It made such a terrible draught in the huts, and smote the boughs against the walls, and broke the window-panes, and tore and beat on the huts like butting rams, till they feared it might carry Lipka away bodily into space!

It subsided a little before dawn; but hardly had the crowing cocks sung daybreak, and the weary inhabitants fallen asleep, when the thunders uttered their roars, the lightnings blazed across the sky with blood-red streaks, and a torrent of rain poured down. It was said afterwards that a thunderbolt had then fallen somewhere in the forest.

But when morning had fully come, it cleared up gloriously; the rain ceased, warmth came steaming up from the fields, the small birds chirruped cheerily; and though the sun was hidden still, the white low-sailing clouds fell asunder and the azure sky appeared. And folk predicted fine weather.

All through the village now arose lamentations and outcries. Very much harm had been done by the gale; the roads were so strewn with rows of fallen trees across them, and fences blown over the ways, with portions of torn-off roofs, that they were impassable.

At the Ploshkas', the sties had fallen, crushing all their geese to death! There was no hut but had suffered in the storm: so the enclosures were filled with women as full of tears as a showery day.

Hanka had just sallied forth to inspect the farm-buildings and see what damage had been done, when she met Sikora's wife, who came rushing into the yard.

"What! have ye not heard? Staho's hut has fallen! By a miracle, they have escaped being crushed," she cried from afar.

"Jesu Maria!"

The news petrified her.

"I have come for you.—Those folk are clean out of their wits!"

Throwing an apron over her head, Hanka ran to the spot.

It was quite true. Nothing of Staho's cabin remained but the walls. All the roof had gone, except a few broken rafters, still hanging above. The chimney, too, had fallen; only a ruined fragment of it stood there, like the snag of a decayed tooth. The floor was covered with splinters and bits of thatch.

Veronka, sitting outside the wall on a heap of fallen rubbish, was embracing her little ones, who wept aloud with her.

Hanka rushed to comfort her through the crowd she was surrounded with; but she saw nothing, heard nothing, and her sobs continued, violent and convulsive.

"O my poor, my miserable children!" she moaned, and several other women shed tears of compassion, to hear her.

"Whither shall we wretched creatures go? where lay our heads?" she cried frantically, clasping her children in her arms.

Old Bylitsa, meanwhile, shrunken, haggard, livid as a corpse, went about the ruins, now driving the fowls together, now giving a few wisps of hay to the cow, tethered to a cherry-tree, now crouching close to the wall, whistling to the dog, and staring at the people like a man demented.

They thought, indeed, that he was out of his mind.

With a sudden movement, they all made way, bowing to the very ground: it was the parish priest, come upon them unexpectedly.

"Ambrose has just informed me of this calamity. Where is Stahova?"

They drew aside for him to see her; but she, blinded by her tears, took no notice.



"Veronka," Hanka said to her in a whisper, "here is his Reverence himself, come to see you!"

She started at the words, and, seeing the priest, fell at his feet in a tempest of tears.

"Peace, be still; do not weep.—What is to be done? It is—aye, it *is*—God's will!" he said twice, brushing a tear away, and deeply moved.

"We must go hence, and beg our bread through the world!"

"No, no; do not give way so. There are kindly folk, and they will not suffer you to perish. Moreover, the Lord will help you in His own way. Has any one of you been hurt? No?"

"In that, God has been merciful"

"Truly, a marvellous escape!"

"They might well have all been crushed to death, like Ploshka's geese," someone said.

"Yes," another remarked, "all without exception."

"Any cattle or live stock lost, eh?"

"God ordered things so that all was then in the enclosure and nothing lost."

The priest, taking a pinch of snuff, looked round at the heap of rubbish, all that remained of their cabin; and his eyes again brimmed with tears.

"Really, it is a very great mercy. Ye might have been all crushed flat."

"But had that been, I should not be looking on these ruins now, nor live to see our home destroyed. O my Jesus, my Jesus! Here am I with my little ones, homeless! What shall I do, and whither shall I go?" she cried once more, and tore her hair in despair.

The priest shifted uneasily, and spread his hands out with a gesture of indecision. Someone slipped a plank under his feet, saying: "Lest your feet be wetted!" And, indeed, the mud was ankle-deep. He moved on to the plank, and took another pinch of snuff, considering what he should say to comfort her.

Hanka was busily engaged with her sister and father,

while the other women pressed round the priest, and feasted their eyes on him.

More women and children were arriving every instant, and their clogs splashed through the mud, and the gathering crowd made comments in hushed voices, amongst which the sobs, now less violent, of Veronka and her children were heard. On all the faces around, so far as they were visible, with their aprons pulled down over their brows, there were seen much sorrow and deep concern, dark as the cloudy sky overhead: hot tears rolled down many a cheek.

But, in their concern and sorrow, they were calm, and resigned to this visitation of God on their poor neighbour. "What then! should everyone take the affairs of others too much to heart, what room would be left for his own?"

After a pause, the priest turned to Veronka, and said: "Above all things, ye ought to thank the Lord God that your lives have been spared."

"Surely, and if I have to sell my pig for it, I will get the wherewithal for a Mass."

"No need for that. Keep your money for your most urgent wants: I shall say Mass for you as soon after Easter as the Rubric allows."

She kissed his hands gratefully, and clasped his feet, peasant-fashion, whilst he gave her his blessing with the sign of the cross, and, like the best of fathers, caressed the little ones who came crowding round him.

"Now, tell me the manner of it."

"The manner of it?—Why, we went to bed early, having no oil in our lamp, and no wood to make a fire. It blew hard, and the cabin shook, but I had no fear, because it had resisted fiercer gales. The draughts in the room kept me awake for some time, but I must have fallen into a doze at last. All at once, there was a crashing banging sound, and the noise of the walls splitting. O Lord! I thought, the world is falling to pieces!—Out of bed I leapt, but had hardly taken my little ones in my arms, when everything overhead began to crack and break down. I just got to the porch outside, while the roof was thundering



down upon me. Ere I got my wits back, the chimney too fell with an awful noise. In the yard it was blowing fearfully: we could scarce stand, and the thatch went piecemeal down the wind. I had a good way to go to the village in the night; all were sleeping sound there, and I could make no one hear me. So I returned and took shelter with the children in the potato-pit till morning."

"God was watching over you.—That cow, tethered to the cherry-tree, whose is she?"

"Ours. She feeds us: we owe our lives to her alone."

"A good milker, no doubt: loins as straight as a beam.—With calf, I see?"

"She will calve in a few days."

"Take her over to my cow-house; there is room, and she may stay till the grass is grown.—Now, where will you dwell? Tell me where."

At that moment a dog fell a-barking and made a fierce onset upon the people there. Driven off, it sat down on the threshold, and howled dismally.

The priest had shrunk back at its attack. "Is that dog mad?" he asked. "Whose is it?"

"'Tis Kruchek, our dog. Aye, the misfortune has made it daft. A good watch-dog," stammered Bylitsa, hastening to silence it.

The priest then took his leave, beckoning to Sikora's wife to follow him. Holding out both hands to the goodwives who pressed forward to kiss them, he walked away slowly, but was seen for some time talking with the women upon the road.

The womenfolk, having duly pitied their unfortunate neighbour, now departed hastily, all at once remembering breakfast and the work before them.

No one remained about the ruins except the family; and they were thinking how to rescue something more out of the wrecked hut, when Sikora's wife came up, breathless.

"Your abode must be with me, on that side of the cabin where Roch has been teaching. There's no chimney, to be

sure, but you can arrange a makeshift fire-place that will do for the nonce," she said hastily.

"But, good dame, how am I to pay the rent?"

"Take no thought as to that. If ye get money, pay what ye choose; if not, then aid us in our work, or simply say, Thanks; 'twill do. Why, the room stands empty! Most heartily do I invite you; and the priest sends you this bit of paper for present necessities."

She unfolded a three-rouble note.

"May the Lord grant him health!" Veronka exclaimed, kissing the gift.

"There's not another man on earth so kind as he!" Hanka said; and old Bylitsa added:

"In the priest's byre, our cow will not be so very badly off!"

The removal took place at once.

The Sikoras' cabin was by the roadside, not far off; and they carried there such articles as they had managed to get out of the ruins on so short a notice. Hanka ordered Pete to lend a hand, and Roch came a little later, helping them at such a rate that Veronka was settled in her new lodgings before the midday Angelus had rung.

"Now I am next door to a beggar-woman!" she complained bitterly, with a glance round her. "Four corners and a hearth: not one image! not one unbroken dish!"

"I shall fetch you a holy image," Hanka said, soothingly. "Also, any vessels that I shall be able to spare.—And soon Staho will be back, and get men to restore the cabin with him.—Where is Father?"

She wanted him to go to Boryna's with her. But the old man had stayed at the ruined hut, sitting on the threshold binding up a wound in the dog's side.

"Come ye with me," she said; "Veronka's lodgings are not large, and we shall find a corner for you at our place."

"Nay, nay, Hanka; I remain here: here was I born, and here will I die."

No arguments, no entreaties, could shake his determination.



"I shall make myself a straw bed in the passage . . . and if you will have it so, I'll tend the little ones and eat my meals at your home in payment. . . . But take the dog with you: it is wounded. . . . It will take care of the house.—A good watch-dog."

"But," she pointed out, "the passage walls may fall upon you!"

"No, no; they will stand longer than many a man shall live. . . . Do take the dog."

She yielded at last. There was really but little room at Boryna's, and the old man would have been hard to lodge.

She told Pete to slip a string through Kruchek's collar, and take it to the cabin.

"Burek has fled somewhither: Kruchek will fill its place well.—O you good-for-nothing fellow!" she cried, seeing that Pete could not manage the dog.

Old Bylitsa helped to drag it away, chiding it severely. "You foolish Kruchek! Here, there's naught to eat; there, you'll get plenty, and a warm place to lie in!"

But she went before them, in order to look in at her sister's new abode, before going home.

To her surprise, she found Veronka again in tears, and several women with her.

"How have I ever deserved such kindness from you?" she sobbed.

"'Tis but little we can give; we too are poor: but take what we bring you, it is given with goodwill." So said Klembova, putting a large parcel in her hands.

The others chimed in:

"Such a mishap!"

"We know what it means to you, and our hearts are not of stone."

"And your goodman is away too, as ours are."

"And that makes it so much harder for you!"

"Our Lord has sent a far heavier trial to you than to us."

They had put their heads together to bring her what they could: pease, pearl barley, flour . . . and so forth.

"O kind goodwives, dear to me as ever my own mother

was!" And she embraced them fondly, with many a sob, whilst they wept with her.

But Hanka had no time to stay; so, glad that there were still good people in the world, she hurried back to her cabin.

Though there was no direct sunlight, it was a pretty fine day, and plenty of sun filtered through the clouds. The sky rose above, like a great sheet of bluish canvas, with white ragged kerchiefs of cloud laid out upon it. Beneath, the fields expanded unendingly, distinctly seen, verdant in places, and in others tawny with stubble or with bits of fallow land, or bright with streams, glittering like window-panes.

Larks sang loud. From the plain was wafted the fresh odour of springtime, redolent with moist warmth, and the honey-sweet aromas of poplar-buds.

There was a breeze, but so soft that the down of the first verdure on the boughs was all but motionless.

About the church were congregated sparrows in such countless multitudes that the wide-spreading branches of the maples and lindens were black with them as with soot, and the deafening din of their chirping was heard throughout the village.

On the smooth lustrous pond, the ganders screamed, watching their goslings, while the sharp squattering of the washerwomen's beaters told that a good deal of linen was being bucked.

Rooms and passages stood wide open from one end of the huts to the other, the wash was drying on the hedges, bedding was being aired in the orchards, and in some places they were whitewashing the walls. Swine, much vexed by dogs, sniffed about in the ditches; and here and there a few cows, lifting their horned heads from behind the fences, would utter a plaintive bellow.

Many a wagon, too, was rolling along to town to make purchases for Eastertide; but, immediately after noonday, there came the old pedlar Yudka in his long cart, with his wife and a young olive-branch.

With a following of unfriendly dogs, they were driving



from hut to hut, and seldom did old Yudka leave with empty hands. For he was no cheat, such as the tavern-keeper and many another: he gave good prices, and, if anyone needed a loan till harvest-time, would grant one on easy terms: a shrewd man, who knew all the folk in the village, and how to deal with them. Often enough he had a calf trotting after his wagon, or half a bushel of good corn inside of it. His Jewess did business, but on her own account, mostly by way of barter; getting eggs, cocks, or moulting hens, for which she would give (at a scandalous profit) the frills and ribbons, the braid and pins, and other articles of finery, so much coveted by the female sex.

As they passed Boryna's, Yuzka rushed in with a shrill cry:

"O Hanka, do buy some red tape! . . . And we want log-wood to colour the Easter eggs! . . . And we need thread also!"

Her voice had sunk to tones of whining entreaty.

"But you shall go to town to-morrow, and buy whatsoever is needed."

"Yes, yes, in town it will be cheaper, for they cheat less!" she exclaimed, delighted at the thought of the morrow's drive; and ran at once, without prompting, to inform the pedlars that they needed none of their wares, and had nothing for sale.

Hanka, peeping outside the door, shouted after her: "Keep the fowls together, lest one should stray into that wagon of theirs!"

Tereska, the soldier's wife, now came running into the premises, away (it seemed) from the Jewess, who was shouting something to her.

She rushed into the cabin, stammering, exceedingly red, and very indignant. A tear or two glistened in her long lashes.

"O Tereska! what is the matter?" Hanka inquired with curiosity.

"Why, that swindling woman will give me no more than

fifteen *zloty* for this woollen skirt. Quite new! And I am in such terrible want of money just now!"

"Let me see it. . . . Is—is it dear?" She would have liked to buy the skirt herself.

"Worth at least thirty *zloty*! Quite new; seven cubits and half a span of stuff! I put more than four pounds of pure wool into it, and paid, moreover, for the dyeing."

She spread it out on the table, where its vivid rainbow tints blazed in the light.

"'Tis more beautiful than any skirt I ever saw! Oh, what a pity I cannot buy it now! . . . I too am short of money for Easter. If ye could but wait till Low Sunday?"

"But, alas! I want the money instantly!"

She rolled the skirt up swiftly, averting her head with a sense of shame.

"The Voyt's wife may purchase it: she generally has money in her purse."

Hanka took it once more, measured its length, and unwillingly returned it.

"You want to send something to your goodman in the army, no doubt?"

"Yes! . . . he wrote . . . complaining . . . in great want. —Farewell!"

She left the hut in a great hurry. Yagustynka, who was busy mashing potatoes in a tub, burst into a roar of laughter.

"You made her run so fast, 'tis a wonder she did not lose her petticoat as she fled!—It is for Matthew she wants the money, not for her husband!"

"What, are they intimate, then?" Hanka asked, much surprised.

"Where do you live? In the forest?"

"But how was I to know about such a thing?"

"Well, 'tis a fact; Tereska runs over to Matthew every week, and wanders about outside the jail all day like a dog, and sends him all she can get."

"My God! what, has she not a goodman of her own?"

"True, but he is far away in the army, and none knows



when he will return . . . and the woman felt lonely all by herself . . . and there was Matthew at hand—a strapping young buck. Wherefore, then, should she deny herself?”

Hanka thought of Antek and Yagna, and fell into a brown study.

“So, when they took Matthew, she made friends with Nastka, his sister; they fadge together very well, and each goes to the town along with the other: Nastka on the pretext of going to her brother, but in reality for Simon, son of Dominikova.”

“Upon my word! ye know of all that happens!”

“’Tis not hard to guess; those fools cannot conceal aught. Think of it!” she added sarcastically; “this creature selling her last skirt that Matthew may get something good to eat!”

“In faith, folk will do strange things.—I shall visit Antek.”

“The way is far . . . and in your present state? . . . It might do you harm.—Could not Yuzka go? Or . . . or someone else?” Yagna’s name was on the tip of her tongue, but she did not utter it.

“God helping, I shall take no harm. Roch said they permit visitors at Easter, and I shall go.—Ah! but we ought to have brought those flitches of bacon over to our own side ere now!”

“Aye, they have lain in brine these three days: that will do.—I’ll go at once.”

Yagustynka went, but was back directly, much agitated, and with the news that half the meat had been taken away!

Hanka ran to the store-room, and Yuzka after her. Both stood presently before the tub, dismayed, and wondering how the meat had disappeared.

“No dog has done this!” Hanka exclaimed; “I can see the cuts of a knife quite plainly.—And a stranger, had he stolen aught, would have taken all.—It’s Yagna’s work!” she said at last, rushing like a whirlwind into her room. But she found it empty, save for old Boryna, staring as ever into vacancy.

Thereupon Yuzka remembered that, on leaving the hut that morning, Yagna was carrying something under her

apron, which she had then thought to be the dress she was, in company with Balcererek's daughter, making up for Eastertide.

"She has taken the meat to her mother's. He that is greedy for a thing cares little whose it is," said Yagustynka. The words put Hanka in a passion.

"Yuzka! call Pete. What remains must be taken over to my store-room now!"

This was done directly. She would have wished to take the corn-barrels too at the same time, in order to overhaul them at her ease; but she decided that there were too many of them, and the smith might come to hear of the matter.

But she looked out doggedly for Yagna all the afternoon, and, when she came in at dusk, swooped down upon her and accused her on the spot.

"Aye, I have eaten it!" she coolly replied; "I have as much right to it as you have!" Almost all the evening, Hanka continued to upbraid her; but, as if to exasperate her of set purpose, she answered not one word more. She even came in to supper as if nothing had happened, and looked her rival in the face with a smile. Hanka could not get the better of her, and raged with impotent hate.

Everything therefore made her angry that evening; she flew out on the slightest provocation, and finally sent everyone to bed earlier than usual. The morrow was Maundy Thursday, and they would have to begin preparations for Easter.

She too went to bed earlier than her wont, but it was long before she could sleep. Hearing the dogs bark furiously, she looked outside.

Yagna had not yet extinguished her lamp.

"It is late," she called out crossly to her from the passage. "Ye waste oil: think ye it costs nothing?"

"Ye may burn oil the whole night long, for all I care!" was the retort; which put her into such a state that she had not yet fallen asleep when the first cock crew.

Early in the morning, Yuzka, though she was a great lie-abed, jumped out first, her mind full of her journey to town;



she speedily woke the farm-lads, told them to get the horses ready, and went back in a temper to quarrel with Hanka, who had told Pete that the bay mare alone was to be put to.

"I will not go in the worst wagon of all, and drawn by a blind mare!" she cried, bursting into tears. "Am I a beggar, to travel in the dung-cart? They know me in the town for Boryna's daughter!—Father would never have allowed me to go in such wise."

By dint of wrangling she got her own way, and started off in the large britzka, with a couple of good horses, and the driver on the seat in front, after the fashion of a farmer's goodwife.

"Get some gilt paper, some red, and of all the other colours!" Vitek screamed to her from within the garden, where he had been digging away ever since dawn, Hanka intending to plant cabbages there that very day. Time passed, however, and she did not come; so he ran out into the road, and went off with the other boys twirling rattles along the hedgerows. (No bells, as is the custom on Maundy Thursday, were to be heard any more.)

The weather was rather quieter, but less cheerful, than on the preceding day. The night had been cold; the morning was dewy, hazy and cool till late in the forenoon: the swallows twittered shivering under the eaves, and the geese, driven to the pond, uttered louder and harsher notes. But, notwithstanding, the whole village had been up and busy ere sunrise.

Long before breakfast-time, there had been the noisy hum of strenuous work; and the children, sent out of the cabins, where they would have been in the way, filled the lanes with the din of their whirring rattles.

At Mass, celebrated on that day without bells or organ, there were but few present.

No one had any time to go to church. All necessary preparations for the great feast had to be made now. Chief of these was the baking of loaves and cakes; and, in well-nigh every hut, both doors and windows were now fast closed, lest the dough might fail to rise. The fires burned bright,

and the smoke of the chimneys went up to the cloudy sky.

This, too, was the reason why not infrequently the cattle lowed beside their empty mangers, and the swine rooted in the gardens, and the poultry wandered about the roads, and the children were left to do as they pleased—fight each other, or climb trees for birds' nests. All the women were so absorbed in the kneading and rolling out of the dough for loaves and cakes, and all that pertained thereto, that they had forgotten nearly everything else besides.

And in every home this bustle and stir was the same: whether at the miller's, the organist's, or the priest's; whether amongst the farmers or the *Komorniki*. However poor, they had—were it by a loan or even by selling their last half-bushel of wheat—to prepare the banquet of the Hallow-fare, in order to get, at least once a year, meat and other dainties in abundance.

As there were not baking-ovens in every hut, makeshifts were built up in the orchards, and girls ran about, feeding them with dry faggots and logs. And from time to time there were seen women uncouthly attired and white with flour, carefully carrying dressers and kneading-troughs, full of cakes as yet unbaked and hidden from the air, as the statues of the saints are seen carried in a holy procession.

There was work, too, to be done in the church. The priest-man had fetched a number of young fir-trees from the woods; and the organist, together with Roch and Ambrose, were adorning Our Lord's Sepulchre.

When Good Friday came, the work was still more absorbing, so that but few noticed the arrival of Yanek, the organist's son, who had come over for the holidays, and was going about the village, now and then taking a peep into the cottage windows.

Entering anywhere was out of the question: the passages, nay, even the orchard paths were blocked up with presses and bedsteads and all sorts of furniture; for on that day they whitewashed the cabins in all haste, scrubbed the floors, and cleaned the holy images that had been taken outside.

A great hurry-scurry and confusion prevailed everywhere:



people were running about, urging the others to make haste and thereby increasing the turmoil. Even the children were now employed to clear the premises of mud, and sprinkle yellow sand everywhere.

It being an ancient custom to eat nothing warm from Good Friday till Easter Sunday, the people chose to suffer a little hunger in our Lord's honour, eating only dry bread and potatoes that had been roasted.

The hurry and bustle were just the same at Boryna's, with the difference that there were more hands to work and less trouble about money, so that all was ready sooner.

On Friday, at the first glimmer of dawn, Hanka had, together with Pete, finished whitewashing the cabin and out-houses, after which, and a hasty toilet, she had gone to church, where the other women were already assembled to be present at the carrying of the Lord's Body to the Sepulchre.

In the cabin, a big fire was blazing up the chimney; and on it, in a vast cauldron that a couple of men could hardly lift, an entire ham was simmering, while sausages bobbed up and down in a smaller pot; from these the room was penetrated with so strong and delicious a scent that Vitek, busy whittling toys for the little ones, would again and again lift up his nose, and sniff and draw a deep breath of longing.

Before the fire-place, and in the brightest light of the flames, sat Yagna and Yuzka, amicably engaged in colouring the Easter eggs, though each vied with the other and kept her methods secret. Yagna washed hers first in tepid water, dried them, and then overlaid them with dots and patches of melted wax, and plunged them successively into the seething contents of three small pots. It was tedious work; the wax scaled off sometimes, or the eggs broke under her hands, or burst in the boiling; but she succeeded with about thirty. And then, oh, what things of beauty they were!

The idea of Yuzka as Yagna's rival! Hers had been boiled with ears of rye and onion-skins that stained them a

pretty reddish-brown, which she had embellished with variegated white and yellow patterns, uncommonly pleasing to the eye. . . . But, when she saw Yagna's work, she remained open-mouthed with amazement, presently followed by vexation and annoyance.—Why, they dazzled the eyes with their red and yellow and violet tints, and colours like fields of blue flax-flowers! And upon those backgrounds there were painted such wonders that she could not believe her eyes: on one, cocks perched upon a fence and crowing open-beaked; on another, a lot of geese hissing at a sow that wallowed in the mud: here you saw a flock of doves flying over a crimson field, and there fantastic traceries of a bewildering type, and like the frost-patterns on the panes in winter.

Wondering, she gazed upon them again and again. Hanka, too, looked at them when she got back from church with Yagustynka, but said not one word. Only the old woman, after a glance at them all, gave vent to her surprise:

"How in the world have ye come by such fancies? Dear, dear!"

"How? Why, they just flowed from my head to my fingers."

She was pleased with herself.

"Ye might take a few to his Reverence."

"I shall offer him some; it may be that he will accept them."

"His Reverence, indeed! Never saw such marvels! Will be thunderstruck with them!" Hanka muttered ironically, when Yagna had gone from the room.

That evening many villagers sat up late.

It was a black night, overcast, though still. The mill clattered on steadily, and the lamps gleamed in the hut-windows till close on midnight, throwing many streaks of light out into the lanes and over the trembling surface of the pond.

Saturday came, quite warm and a little hazy, but brighter than the previous day; so that the people, notwithstanding



the hard work done already, rose blithely to encounter what was coming.

Outside the church, there was a great noise and tumult: for, according to immemorial custom, on that day (which brought Lent to its close) they had come together in the early morning to give a funeral to the *zur*<sup>1</sup> and herrings on which they had been feeding all Lent through. There were no grown-up men in Lipka now; so the youngsters arranged the funeral, with Yasyek Topsy-turvy at their head. They had got, somewhere or other, a big pot of *zur*, to which they had added certain filthy matters besides.

Vitek let himself be enticed into carrying the pot, which dangled from his shoulder in a net, whilst another little fellow, at his side, dragged along the ground a herring cut out of wood and attached to a string. They went foremost, the others trooping behind with a deafening noise of rattles and shouts.

Yasyek directed the procession: though somewhat idiotic in life, he had quite enough brains for such tomfoolery. They went in procession round the pond and church, and turned off to the poplar road where the funeral was to take place . . . when suddenly Yasyek struck at the pot with a spade and shivered it to pieces! And the *zur*, with all its filth, poured over Vitek's clothes!

This practical joke made everybody laugh very heartily, except Vitek, who flew at Yasyek and fought with him and with the other boys until, overpowered by numbers, he was forced to flee roaring home.

There he got a beating besides from Hanka, for having ruined his coat; and then she sent him to the woods to get sprays of pine-boughs for decorations.

Pete laughed at him into the bargain; nor did even Yuzka show him sympathy. She was busily engaged in strewing all the premises as far as the road with sand brought from

<sup>1</sup> *Zur* is a sort of soup made of flour and water, mixed with bran and left to ferment till it is sour. It is then boiled with various seasonings.—*Translator's Note.*

the churchyard; its yellow was deepest there. She scattered it over the whole drive up to the porch, and all round the eaves, encircling the cabin with a saffron-coloured girdle.

And now, in Boryna's cabin, they began to set forth the victuals that were to be blessed by the priest.

The great room had been well scoured and sanded, the windows cleaned, and all traces of cobwebs brushed away from the images on the walls. Yagna's bed, too, had been covered with a beautiful shawl.

Hanka, Yagna and Dominikova, working together, though in all but absolute silence, had dragged a large table near the corner window, parallel to the bed where Boryna lay, and covered it with a white linen table-cloth, the edges of which Yagna had embellished with a border of red paper fantastically cut out. In the centre, and opposite the window, they then set up a big crucifix, adorned with paper flowers, and in front of this, upon a dish turned bottom upwards, a lamb moulded out of butter by Yagna so cleverly that it seemed alive. Its eyes were rosary beads; its tail, ears, hoofs and the banner over it were made of crisp red wool! After this, there came a first row of great loaves and wheaten cakes large and small, white or tawny; some stuck all over with raisins (certain of these being specially made for Yuzka and the little ones); others, again, were very dainty ones all of curds, or frosted with sugar and sprinkled with poppy-seed. And, quite at the end, there stood, on one side, an enormous dish full of great snaky coils of sausages, and hard-boiled eggs (white, for they had been shelled) within the coils to adorn them; on the other, a pan containing an entire ham, and a huge piece of so-called "head-cheese," all these gay with coloured eggs strewn about. But the whole affair still awaited the coming of Vitek with the sprays and sprigs of pine-needles to give it the finishing touch.

As they brought this work to an end, several neighbours came in with dishes and baskets containing their own Easter victuals, which they put near the table on a side-bench.



There was not time enough for the priest to go round to all the cabins, so he had told them to bring their Easter feast to a few of the largest cottages.

Lipka being his own dwelling-place, he used to give the blessing there last of all, and very often only near nightfall. The people, consequently, prepared everything early, that they might be in church in time for the "blessing of the fire and of the water," having previously extinguished their own fires at home, which were subsequently to be again lighted at the newly consecrated flame.

Yuzka ran to church for that purpose; but she had to wait very long, and it was nearly midday when she returned, carefully protecting the light of a taper just kindled in church. Along with the fire, she brought a bottle of holy water. Hanka immediately lit the fire-wood set ready for kindling, and first of all drank a gulp of holy water, piously believed to preserve folk from ailments of the throat; she then gave some to each of the others in turn, and lastly sprinkled with it the live stock and the fruit-trees of the orchard, that the cattle might bring forth their young without trouble, and the trees abound with fruit.

Later, seeing that neither Yagna nor the smith's wife had taken any care at all of Boryna, she washed his body with tepid water, combed his matted hair, and changed his linen and bedding; he meanwhile lying as usual with blankly staring eyes.

After noontide, it was a sort of half-holiday. Although some people had still a little of the more tiresome work to finish, the most part were getting themselves ready for the coming feast, combing and washing and scrubbing the children, till many a hut resounded to their cries and screams.

It was only just before nightfall that the priest came in from the outlying villages. He wore his surplice; Michael, the organist's pupil, went after him, bearing a holy-water pot and sprinkling-brush. Hanka came to meet him at the gate.

He came in quickly, being in a hurry, said the prayers,

sprinkled "God's gifts," and cast a glance on Boryna's livid hairy face.

"No change? eh?"

"None. The wound is all but healed, yet he is no better."

"The boy who sold me the stork—where is he?"

Vitek turned very red, and Yuzka pushed him forward.

"Ye have trained it well: it keeps the fowls out of the garden, and none dare venture in.—Here are five kopeks for you.—Are any of you going to see your husbands to-morrow?"

"Half the village at least."

"Good; but behave yourselves, and do not brawl.—And come to the Resurrection Service now: it is at ten.—At ten, mind! And," he added sharply, as he went out, "should anyone fall asleep, Ambrose has orders to put him out of the church."

Several people followed him as far as the miller's.

But Vitek, showing the copper coin to Yuzka, said crossly:

"My stork will not drive his fowls out for long. Oh, no!"

The darkness fell slowly. Dusk came down over the earth, drowning cottages, orchards and fields in a bluish semi-transparent murk. The low cabin-walls alone were here and there dimly visible. Athwart the orchards flashed a few flickering lights, and a pale half-moon gleamed in the sky.

It was the calm of Easter eve that enveloped the village; through the darkness, the church-windows, high above the cottages, were seen shedding floods of light afar, and out of the great wide-open door poured streams of splendour.

Then the first carts came rumbling in, stopping in front of the churchyard; and the people arrived on foot from the farthest hamlets. Many also came from the cottages of Lipka; not infrequently the doors would open and a streak of light flash forth, plunging into the jet-black pond; and the patter of footsteps and half-hushed murmurs came multitudinous through the warm and misty air. Greeting one another on the way, the crowd, like a river that rises slowly but unceasingly, pressed onwards to the "Resurrection Service."



In Boryna's cabin and the surrounding outhouses, no one remained on guard but the dogs, old Bylitsa and Vitek, who was hard at work with Maciek, Klemba's son, making a cock that was to perform wonderful feats a few days later.

Hanka first sent Yuzka to church, along with the little ones and Pete; she herself, she said, would follow presently.

Yet, when dressed, she lingered on, awaiting something, it seemed; for she continually went out and watched the road from the passage. When she had seen Yagna set out with Magda, and heard the smith in talk with the Voyt on their way to church, she returned to the hut, and showed something in silence to the old man. He thereupon went outside to watch, while she walked on tiptoe to her father-in-law's store-room. . . . A good half-hour elapsed before she came out, carefully buttoning something in her bodice. Her eyes sparkled; her hands were shaking.

Murmuring incoherent words, she went on to the "Resurrection Service."

## CHAPTER V

IT was pitch-dark in the lanes; in every cottage all the lights were out; the laggards were now dropping in to church. Outside stood a number of carts, with horses unharnessed, whose pawing and snorting made their presence heard in the gloom. Close to the belfry, several Manor-house coaches loomed apart.

Hanka, on entering the porch, set something straight in her bodice, loosened her shawl that wrapped her too closely, and vigorously elbowed her way to the first pews.

The church was very full indeed. The close-pressed congregation was massed in the aisles; and, with mingled prayers, ejaculations and coughs, they swayed and swung from wall to wall, till the banners stuck in the pews, and the fir saplings which adorned the church, began to wave also.

Scarcely had she pushed through to her place, when the priest began the service.

They fell on their knees devoutly, and the press became still greater, till all knelt close together, like a field of heads—a cluster of human plants—but with eyes swiftly darting and flying up to the high altar, whereon stood the figure of Jesus, risen from the dead, with bare limbs, draped only in a crimson mantle, holding His banner in His hand, and showing His five wounds to them all!

By degrees their prayers grew intensely fervent; words uttered low, and presently sighs, came welling up to their lips, like the sounds of raindrops falling on leaves; and then their heads bent lower still, their arms were stretched forth towards the altar beseechingly, and stifled weeping was heard. Under the shadow of the dark naves with their lofty pillars, the crowd seemed as clumps of brushwood amongst the great trees of some immemorial forest; for, though the



altar was ablaze with tapers, the church itself was shrouded in gloom, and the black night crept in through the windows and the wide-open portal.

But Hanka could not compose herself to pray; she trembled all over, not less upset than when in her father-in-law's store-room a while before.

Once more; and shudderingly, she felt her hands plunging in the cool grains of corn; and she pressed her shoulders forward, to make sure that the bundle was still nestling between her breasts.

Joy and terror alternately held her in their grip. The rosary slipped from her fingers; she could not remember her prayers; looking round with eyes aflame, she recognized no one, though Yuzka and Yagna with her mother sat close by.

In the pews which stood on either side of the sanctuary, the ladies from the manors of Rudka, Modlitsa and Volka were reading out of prayer-books; at the sacristy-door several squires stood talking to each other; gaudily arrayed, the miller's wife and the organist's were standing close to the high altar on either side. But, just outside the Communion railings, once the place for the first amongst the Lipka farmers—who were the overseers at every service, who carried the canopy over his Reverence and supported his steps in the processions—there now knelt a dense multitude of peasants from other villages, and scarce any to represent Lipka but the Voyt, the Soltys and the carrot-headed blacksmith.

Besides Hanka's, other eyes too wandered in that direction, sorrowful, and remembering the absent dear ones. Those men, once the foremost in the parish, were alone not to be seen there now! The thought depressed them, and bore many a head down to the pavement, with painful memories of their present bereavement.

Alas! it was the greatest festival in the whole year—Easter! So many other faces were there, from other parts of the parish, full of gladness, though a little emaciated by the long fast of Lent. Folk had come, splendidly clad, to

swagger in the church like Manor-folk, and occupy all the best places; and the poor men of Lipka—where were they? In dungeons, suffering cold and hunger, and longing for home!

For all but them it was the great day of joy. The others would presently return home and enjoy life and rest and food, the sunny springtime, and friendly talk: but not the poor Lipka folk!

They would crawl back to their desolate homesteads, lonely, drooping, miserable; would eat their Easter meal in tears, and go to their couches full of unrest and vain desires.

"O Lord! O Lord!" were the dreary half-stifled ejaculations that went up around Hanka's pew, and made her at last come to herself again and look upon the well-known faces and eyes dimmed with tears. Even Yagna hung her head over her book, crying bitterly, till her mother nudged her to bring her back to reality. But the source of her misery was far different, and nothing could allay it. Was it not at Christmas, in this very pew, that she had heard *his* burning whisper and felt *his* head droop down upon her knee? The thought tore her breast with a sudden excruciating yearning.

It was then that his Reverence began to preach, and they all rose from their knees, thronging round the pulpit as close as might be—every face turned to hear him. First he spoke of our Lord's Passion, and of those vile Jews who crucified Him for coming to save the world, deal justice to the oppressed, and uphold the cause of the needy. And he set the sufferings of Jesus so vividly before their eyes that many a one grew hot with indignation, and more than one peasant, eager to avenge Christ, clenched his fist; and all the womenfolk sobbed aloud in chorus.

And then he turned upon the people themselves; bending forward over the pulpit, he shook his fists, crying out that every day, every hour, everywhere, Jesus was crucified by our sins, slain by our wickedness, our ungodliness, our con-



tempt for God's law; that we all crucified Him within ourselves anew, forgetful of His sacred wounds and of the blood He shed for our salvation!

At the words, the whole congregation burst into a tempest of wailing and sobbing; and such a storm of lamentation swept through aisles and nave that he had to pause awhile. Then he went on to speak, but more cheerful and with words of comfort, of the Resurrection of Christ. Of that springtide which the Lord in His bounty sends—and will always send—to sinful men, until such time as He shall come to judge the living and the dead, and abase the proud, and hurl the wicked into the fires of hell, and place the good on His right hand in everlasting glory. Yea! the time should come when all injustice should have an end, all wrong receive its punishment, all tears be wiped away, all evil enchained for ever!

He spoke so earnestly and with such kindness of heart that every word of his sank into their minds with sweet mastery, and brought sunshine into every soul; and everyone felt consoled and radiant—except his hearers of Lipka. These quivered with anguish, with the remembrance of the wrongs done them racking their minds. They burst out crying and groaning, and threw themselves down upon the pavement with outstretched arms, asking from the bottom of their hearts for mercy and relief in their woes.

Throughout the church the emotion was profound. A universal cry arose; but soon they remembered where they were, raised up the prostrate women of Lipka, and comforted them with kind words. His Reverence, too, deeply moved, wiped away his tears with his surplice sleeve; and then he reminded them how our Lord chastiseth them that He loveth; and said that though they had not done aright, their punishment would very shortly be ended. "Let them but trust in the Lord, and they would very shortly see the return of their husbands."

Thus he quieted and relieved them, and they once more began to take confidence.

Presently the priest, from the high altar, intoned the

grand "Resurrection chant"; the organ took it up with a roar and boomed sonorously; all the bells rang out and pealed aloud. And then his Reverence, bearing the Most Holy Sacrament, surrounded with a thin blue cloud of incense smoke and the tumultuous din in the belfry, came down towards the people. The chant was continued, bursting forth from every throat; the waves of the crowd tossed and rolled, a fiery blast of enthusiasm dried every tear and lifted every soul to Heaven. So all together, like a living and moving human grove, swaying hither and thither as they sang the hymn in grand unison, went forward in procession, following the priest holding the Monstrance aloft in front of him, as a golden sun that burned above their heads, with chants sounding on all sides and bright tapers all around, scarce visible through the smoke shot forth from the censers: the object of the gaze of every eye, of the love of every heart!

With slow and measured steps did the procession wend along the nave and thread the aisles, in a close-packed, surging, vociferously sonorous crowd.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! The noise was deafening; the very pillars and arches thrilled to the chant. Hearts and throats burst forth with one accord; and those glowing voices, instinct with mystic fire, flew up to the vault like flame-birds, and sailed out afar into the night, seeking the sun away in those regions to which at such times the soul of man mounts upon the wings of rapture.

It was close on midnight when the service ended and the congregation began to break up. Hanka lingered behind. She had been praying ecstatically; for the priest's words had filled her with confidence, and the service itself, together with the memory of what she had that very day achieved, gave her such intense joy that she desired to lay it all at the feet of Jesus Risen. But Ambrose at last came jingling his keys and signifying to her that she must now leave the church.

As she went out, even that passion of fear for Antek which lived within her heart and was wont to start up on the



slightest occasion, had as she thought suddenly died out of her.

She saw at a distance the rest of her household plodding home. The carts were rolling along in an unbroken procession, and the foot-passengers had to go in groups by the side of the road, almost invisible now that the moon had set and darkness reigned.

In the warm quiet night, damp with abundant dew, the breeze blowing athwart the fields was laden with the raw moist odour of the earth; and from the roads there came the honey-sweet fragrance of budding poplars and birches. Folk swarmed along through the shadows; where the gloom was less pitch-black, a few heads appeared, dimly visible. Steps and voices resounded on every side; angry dogs barked, rushing along behind the palings; and in hut and cabin, lights began to gleam.

Hanka, after taking a look into the byre and stable as she entered, went in and laid herself down at once.

"Let him but return and be master here: I shall never say a word to him of what has been," was her resolution while she was undressing.—"Ah, but," she thought once more, hearing Yagna opening the door on the other side, "what if he should fall and go to her again?"

Listening, thinking, she lay still for some time. All was growing silent, with the hum of voices fading into the distance, and the faint clatter of the last wagons going away.

"—Then there would be no God, no justice in this world!" she ejaculated fiercely.—But a deep sleep came over her, and she gave up thinking of this.

. . . . .

The village awoke very late the next day.

Morning was already opening his pale-blue slumberous eyes, and as yet those of the Lipka folk were all fast closed.

The sun rose directly in the East, making the ponds and the dewy meadows glitter: its beams floated down from the pallid sky above, singing to the world its Hallelujah—its song of warmth and light.

Merry and sparkling, that song was echoed among the ground-mists: birds twittered gladly, the waters tinkled and bubbled with mirth, the great woods murmured, the breeze blew, the young leaves quivered, the very clods were a-tremble; and from the undulating fleeces on the corn-lands, bright dew-drops fell like tears upon the earth.

"Ah! the grand day of joy for us is dawning:  
Conqueror of death, Christ rose on Easter morning!  
Hallelujah!"

Yes, Christ had risen—He, tortured and slain by the wickedness of men. Again He had returned to life, He, the Well-beloved, as light rising up in darkness; had opened the cruel grip of death; for the welfare of man He had vanquished the invincible. And behold Him now, in that spring season, hiding mysteriously in His sacred sun, to sow happiness throughout the world—to rouse the faint—to quicken the dead—to raise the fallen ones, and make fertile the fallows!

One cry echoed over all the land: Hallelujah! for the great day that the Lord had made!

In Lipka alone were the folk less uproariously joyful than in former years.

They slept most soundly. Only when the sun had risen above the orchards did the people begin to move, and the doors to creak, and unkempt tousled heads to peep outside the cabins at the country-side steeped in light, ringing with the songs of larks, and overspread with delicate verdure.

So at Boryna's, too, the folk were sleeping. Hanka alone, anxious that Pete should get the horses and britzka ready, rose a little earlier, and then set to making out the portions of the Hallow-fare for each.

Yuzka, fussy and chattering, was presently engaged in tidying the children, and putting on their best clothes; and at the well in the court-yard Pete and Vitek were washing themselves thoroughly, while old Bylitsa amused himself with the dog in the porch, and from time to time sniffed inquiringly. Had Hanka yet begun slicing the sausages?



According to custom immemorial, they lit no fire that day, but ate the Hallow-fare cold. Hanka had just fetched it out of old Boryna's apartments, and was setting it out on plates, for everyone to get an equal portion of sausage, ham, cheese, bread, and eggs, and sweet cake.

Then, having first completed her own toilet, she called everyone in . . . even Yagna, who at once made her appearance, beautifully arrayed, and looking fair as the dawning sun, her eyes of turquoise-blue shining beneath her glossy flaxen hair.—All were in the very best apparel. Vitek, indeed, was bare-footed; but he wore a new spencer with bright buttons; the latter begged from Pete, who made his appearance clean-shaven, his hair freshly cut straight over his forehead, wearing a completely new suit—a black-blue *zupan* with green and yellow-striped trousers, and a shirt tied with a red ribbon. When he came in, everyone was amazed at his transformation, and Yuzka clapped her hands with delight.

"O Pete! your own mother would not know you!"

And Bylitsa observed: "Once he has thrown off that dog's skin of a uniform, he's as fine a peasant as any!"

Greatly flattered, Pete smiled, rolled his eyes at Yagna, and drew himself up stiffly.

Hanka, crossing herself, drank to each in turn and made them sit down at table, on the benches. Even Vitek took a seat timidly at one end.

They ate with the utmost deliberation, taking into themselves with religious silence all the savour of the food they had gone without for so many weeks. The sausages had a strong flavour of the garlic with which they had been abundantly supplied; the room reeked with it, and the dogs pressed in to enjoy its pungent scent.

No one said a word until the first pangs of hunger had been appeased.

Pete was first to speak. "Are we to start directly?"

"Yes, as soon as breakfast is over."

"Yagustynka," Yuzka reminded her, "wished to go to town with you."

"If she come in time, she shall: but I do not wait for her."

"Any provender?"

"Enough for one feed only: we return in the evening."

They continued to eat till their faces were flushed with delight, and they felt their garments tight about them, and some had eyes starting from their sockets. This slowness in eating was intentional, that they might stow away as much as possible and enjoy their meal to the full; and when Hanka rose from table, there was nothing empty about them; Pete and Vitek even carried away to the stable all the remains of their portions, to finish them later.

"Now," Hanka's command rang out, "put the horses to, this instant!"—And, having made up for her husband such a parcel as she scarce could lift, she dressed for the journey.

Yagustynka came in quite out of breath, and just as the horses were pawing the ground outside the cabin.

"We were about to start without you!"

"Alas! and the Hallow-fare is over?" She sniffed ruefully and drew a long breath.

"There is yet a morsel or two: sit down and take what's left."

The poor hungry creature needed no pressing. Ravenous as a wolf, she set to, and swept the platter clean.

"When the Lord Jesus created the pig, He knew well what He was doing!" she exclaimed, after a few mouthfuls; adding, as a gentle hint in the form of a joke: "Strange, though, that men let it wallow in the mud during life, and are afterwards so willing to wash it in vodka!"

"Well, here is some: drink our healths and be quick: there is no time!"

In about the space of a Pater, they were off. From the britzka, Hanka reminded Yuzka not to forget her father. She immediately went to him with a plateful of various meats, and tried to speak with him. Though he did not reply, he swallowed all she put in his mouth, staring vacantly as ever. Possibly he might have taken some more; but Yuzka soon tired of feeding him, and ran out to the gate



to look at the many women, either driving (there were upwards of a score of wagons) or else trudging to town with great packs on their shoulders.

Soon, however, the clatter ceased, and melancholy reigned throughout the village.

Yes, melancholy! notwithstanding the bright sun on high, and that pond as of glass mingled with fire, and the trees all bathed in aromatic perfumes and brilliantly fresh green tints, and the quiet loveliness of spring now spreading over the world—the blue haze on the vast rolling plain, the larks that sang, the far-off villages tremulous under the blaze of day, and resounding with loud pistol-shots and merry-making!

Lipka, Lipka alone, was sad, abandoned, forsaken; and the hours there crept drearily and wearily by.

Noon was at hand, when Roch went over to Boryna's, to see after the sick man, and have a talk with the children, and sit in the sun. He read for a while, often lifting his eyes to the road, and presently saw the smith's wife come in with her little ones. She sat down outside the hut, after having looked in at her father's.

"Is your goodman at home?" Roch asked her after a pause.

"Oh, no! Gone to town with the Voyt."

"All Lipka is there to-day."

"Aye, and the poor sufferers will have some morsels of the Hallow-fare to comfort them."

Yagna was just going out.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Have ye not gone to town with your mother?"

"And what business have I there?" she returned, stepping out of the enclosure, and looking wistfully along the road.

Magda sighed. "She has a new skirt on to-day!"

"'Twas Mother's!" Yuzka told her sullenly. "Did ye not see that? All those coral and amber beads on her bosom were Mother's as well. The kerchief on her head is her own—nothing else!"

"True. So many a thing have his dead wives left him!

He never would let us touch any; and now all are hers, to strut about in!"

"Yet she railed at them the other day—told Nastka the garments were mouldy and noisome!"

"Oh, may they smell of devil's dirt to her!"

"Let Father but be healed! . . . I shall tell him instantly about the corals. . . . Five strings of them there were, every one as long as a whip, and each bead as big as the largest pea!"—And Magda, having said her say, heaved a deep sigh, and spoke no more.—Yuzka slipped away; Vitek, outside the stable, was busily constructing a toy something like a cock; while the children played in the porch with the dogs, under the eyes of old Bylitsa, who watched over them as a hen over her chickens.

"Is the field-work here finished?" Roch inquired of him.

"Aye, as far as pea-sowing and potato-planting go: no more."

"Few folk here can say as much."

"All will be well, we are told: the men are to be set free on Low Sunday."

"Who, then, knew so much . . . and said it?"

"'Twas a whisper that went about the congregation.—And Kozlova is to go and beseech the Squire!"

"The more fool she! Was it the Squire who cast them into prison?"

"His intercession might set them free."

"Once he did speak, but naught came of it."

"Had he but a little goodwill! But my goodman says he hates Lipka, and will do naught for us. . . ." Here Magda broke off abruptly, and became more interested in her children, and Roch listened in vain for any more information from her.

"And when," he asked with interest, "when is Kozlova going to him?"

"At once, as soon as noon is past."

"Well, then, all she will get of it will be a walk and some fresh air."

She did not reply. Just then, the Squire's brother, Mr.



Yacek, commonly held to be somewhat feeble-minded, came in from the road into the enclosure, with his long yellow beard and wandering eyes, bowed down, pipe in mouth and violin under his arm as usual. Roch went out to meet him. They surely must have been well acquainted; for they went and sat together on the stones by the shore of the mill-pond, and talked so long that it was well into the afternoon when they separated. But Roch came back to the porch, out of sorts and gloomy.

"That gentleman," Bylitsa remarked, "has grown so thin, I scarcely knew him."

"Did ye know him of old, then?" said Roch, dropping his voice as he glanced at the blacksmith's wife.

"To be sure, I did. . . . He was a gay youngster once upon a time. . . . Aye, and a sad fellow with the wenches. . . . In Vola, they said, not one of them slipped through his fingers.—Ah, and I remember what splendid horses he used to ride—and what a rake he was.—Aye, aye, I remember well," the old man said maunderingly.

"For that he is now doing a sore penance. A sore penance, I say.—Are ye not the oldest man in the village?"

"Nay, Ambrose must be older: I cannot remember him but as an old man."

"He himself," the smith's wife put in, "says that Death has overlooked him."

"No, Dame Crossbones never overlooks anyone; but she leaves him to the last, that he may repent. For he is greatly hardened."

Bylitsa continued, after a long silence: "I remember the time when there were no more than fifteen peasants' farms in Lipka." He moved his hand hesitatingly towards Roch's snuff-box, which the latter offered him at once, saying:

"And now there are a couple of score."

"So the land must be divided again and again. Whether the harvest be rich or poor, the folk must always grow poorer. Ye cannot make the land to stretch. Yet a few more years, and there will be too little for us to live upon."

"In truth, we are straitened enough as it is now," the smith's wife observed.

"Yes; and when our lads marry, there will be no more than one acre apiece for their children."

"Therefore," Roch said, "they will have to go abroad."

"And what will they do there? Shall they clutch at the winds, and grasp them in their bare hands?"

"But," he somewhat ruefully observed, "there are some German settlers who have purchased land of the Squire of Slupia, and are working it now: seventy acres to each settlement."

"Of that I have heard. But the Germans are wealthy, and know much: they do business with the Jews, and profit by the sufferings of others. Were that same land to be taken up by empty-handed peasants like us, they would not sow it thrice! For us, there is scant room in Lipka. While that man—why, he has no end of broad acres that lie fallow close by!" And with a sweep of his arm he pointed to the Manor lands beyond the mill, shelving up towards the forest, and black with heaps of lupines.

"All that land," he went on to say, "is close to our own, and might be parcelled out into thirty small holdings.—But the Squire would never sell it: such a rich man cares naught for money."

"Rich? He?" the smith's wife broke in. "He needs money as a mudfish needs mud. Why, he is driven to borrow from the very peasants. The Jews are dunning him now for what they advanced him upon the forest he cannot sell them. He is in arrears with the taxes, does not pay his own people—they have not yet received what is due them in kind for the New Year. He is in debt to everyone; and now that the government has forbidden him to cut down any timber till the peasants' consent is obtained, how is he to get money to pay? He will not be master of Vola very long, not he!—They say he is seeking a purchaser." Here she broke short as unexpectedly as she had begun, and all Roch's efforts to draw her out a little more were useless;



she put him off with a few commonplace remarks, and presently withdrew with her little ones.

"Her goodman," old Bylitsa thought, "must have told her many things, but she fears to speak of them. . . . True, the lands close to Lipka are fertile, and the meadows give an aftermath. Even so . . ." And he went on pondering, with his eyes fixed upon the fields adjoining the forest, and on the Manor farm-buildings.—Roch had meanwhile perceived Kozlova near the pond with other women, and gone over to her in haste.

Meanwhile Bylitsa thought: "We now have beaten the Squire. Now is the time for us peasants to make the most of our advantage.—Surely.—We might found another village: there would be lands enough, and hands enough willing to till it. . . ." But the babies had got out into the road, and this put an end to his musings.

The bells had sounded for Evensong.

The sun was rolling down towards the forest; and over the roadway and mill-pond the shadows were growing longer. All was so quiet that, far away in the distance, a cart was heard to clatter, or a bird to cry out in the copses.

Some women had come back from town, and everyone was running to hear the news they had brought.

His Reverence had driven over to Volka, directly after Vespers: to a party at the Manor, Ambrose said. The organist had gone with all his people to visit the miller, and his son Yanek, in splendid attire, had accompanied his mother, saluting on his way the lasses behind their garden-palings, who peered out at him.

As the evening drew on slowly, the afterglow filled half the sky with sheets of blood-red fire, scattered about like brightly burning embers; and the waters turned crimson, and the window-panes gleamed ruddily, as more wagons came back from town, and in front of the cabins the noise grew louder.

Though Hanka was not yet home, there was plenty of life and din in front of her hut too. A number of little girls of Yuzka's age had come to see her, and were all

warbling and twittering around her like a bevy of finches, and laughing at Yasyek Topsy-turvy: while Yuzka was treating them to such dainties as the cabin afforded on that day.

Nastka, much older than any of the others, was their leader. She was making fun of Yasyek, because, blockhead though he was, he tried to give himself rollicking airs. He stood just then before them all, wearing a brand-new spencer and a hat cocked at a considerable angle, and saying with a smiling look and arms akimbo:

"All of you must respect me—me, the only man in the village!"

"Not so: others as good as you are tending the kine!" said one.

"Or wiping babies' noses!" cried another.

Yasyek, in no wise taken aback, answered them loftily:

"Such chits as ye are—mere goose-girls as yet—are not to my taste!"

"Why, the fellow kept kine last year, and he would play the man now!"

"Yet he runs away from a bull so fast that his breeches come down!"

"Go, marry Magda, the servant of the Jew: she's the girl for you."

"Nurse to the Jew's brats, she'll wipe your nose likewise!"

"Or," someone said still more sarcastically, "take old Agata to wife, and go on pilgrimages with her."

"Oh," he retorted, "if I would but send my proposers to any one of you, she'd fast on dry bread every Friday of her life to thank God for her luck!"

"But," Nastka cried, "whom would your mother let you marry? You're needed to wash the platters at home."

"Provoke me not, you! else I go and marry Mary Balcerek!"

"Aye, do: go to her; she'll receive you with a broomstick—or worse!"

"Go—but take heed not to lose aught on the way!" Nastka said, with a laugh and a slight pull at his breeches,



that were indeed, like the rest of his clothing, much too large for him.

"They were his grandsire's once!"

Jests and gibes fell round him, thick as hail: he laughed as heartily as anyone, and slipped his arm round Nastka's waist. But a girl put her foot out: down he sprawled upon the floor, and could not get up, for they pushed him down again.

"Girls, let him be! How can you?" said Yuzka, coming to the rescue, and helping him up. Though a zany, he was a farmer's son, and her kinsman through her mother.

They then played at blind man's buff with him, who of course was blindfolded, and did not succeed, much as he tried, in catching any of the girls. These flew about him, nimble as swallows, and the noise and laughter and uproar grew louder and louder.

Twilight was falling, and the game was at its height, when the sudden cry of many fowls was heard in the yard. Yuzka, who ran there at once, found Vitek in the outhouse, holding something behind his back, and young Gulbas, whose flaxen head of hair was seen peeping over a plough.

"'Tis naught, Yuzka," Vitek said in confusion, "'tis naught!"

"Ye have been killing a hen: I can see the feathers about!"

"Nay, nay! I only took a few from a cock's tail, which I needed for my own bird.—But, Yuzka, it was no cock of ours! Oh, no! This boy Gulbas brought it here to me."

"Show!" she commanded sternly.

He laid at her feet a bird quite plucked of all its feathers, and in a pitiable state.

"No doubt it is not one of ours," she said, though she could not make sure.

"Now show your marvellous toy!"

Vitek then unveiled an artificial cock, that he had just finished; it was made of wood, plastered over with dough, into which the feathers had been stuck, and it looked as if alive, with a real head and beak mounted on a stick.

It had been fixed upon a board painted red, and very

cleverly attached to a small cart; and when Vitek began to pull at the shaft, the bird would at once dance and flap its wings, Gulbas crowing the while till the hens cackled in reply.

Yuzka squatted down to admire this miracle of art.

"Lord! why, never in my life have I seen aught so wonderful!"

"'Tis good, hey, Yuzka?—I have hit it off well, hey?" he whispered, full of pride.

"And ye have made the thing all out of your own head?"

She was overwhelmed with amazement.

"Aye, all by myself, Yuzka! Yendrek here only brought me this live cock.—Aye, all by myself!"

"Dear, dear! how life-like it moves! And yet 'tis but wood.—Show it to the girls, Vitek! How they all will marvel!—Show it to them, Vitek!"

"Ah, no. We shall go round to-morrow for the *Dyngus*,<sup>1</sup> and then they shall see it. I must still put up a railing all round to protect it."

"Then come round to our big room and work at it, as soon as you have seen to the kine. There will be more light there."

"So I will, but I have something else to do first in the village."

She returned, but the company had finished the game and was now breaking up. For it was dark; lights gleamed in the huts and twinkled in the sky, and the evening chill was rising from the fields.

By now, everybody save Hanka was back from town.

Yuzka prepared a glorious supper: *barszcz* with shredded sausage, and potatoes seasoned with much fried bacon. She set it on the table, where Roch was waiting already; the little ones were whimpering, and Yagna had been looking in more than once. At that moment Vitek glided in noiselessly,

<sup>1</sup> *Dyngus*, called also *Smigus*; a popular festival, with a great deal of horseplay, drenchings and even dousings, on Easter Monday; believed to be a custom surviving from the time when the Poles (in the tenth century) embraced Christianity and were baptized *en masse*.—Translator's Note.



and sat down at once before the smoking dishes. His face was red as fire and he ate but little; his teeth were chattering, his hands trembling; and before supper was ended, he had slunk away.

Yuzka, wondering what was the matter, met him afterwards outside the sty, taking some draff out of the trough, and questioned him sharply.

For some time he tried to hold back the truth, and put her off with fibs; but all came out at last.

"Well, I have got my stork back again from his Reverence!"

"Gracious Lord! and no one saw you?"

"No one. His Reverence was away from home, the dogs were at their meal, and there stood my stork in the porch. Maciek had seen it, and came to let me know. I wrapped it close in Pete's capote lest it should peck at me, carried it off, and hid it . . . somewhere!—But do not, my Yuzka, my golden girl!—do not breathe one word of this. In a few weeks I will bring it round to our cabin, and you'll see it strutting about in front of the porch; and none will know it for the same. Only betray me not!"

"Betray you? have I ever done that? . . . But I am amazed at your daring.—Good heavens!"

"'Twas but my own property I have taken back again. I said I would never give it him: and behold, I have it once more. A likely thing indeed, that I should tame it all for the delight of others! Yea, surely!"—And he ran off, whistling.

Returning presently, he came in and sat down by the fireside with the little ones, intent on finishing his creation.

The cabin became a drowsy tedious place. Yagna had gone over to her side of the hut, and Roch was sitting outside with Bylitsa, who felt very sleepy.

"Get home," Roch said to him; "there, Mr. Yacek is waiting to talk with you."

"Mr. Yacek . . . waiting?" he stammered, astounded and

thoroughly waked up.—“To talk with me? Well, well!” And away he hurried.

Roch stayed where he was, murmuring prayers, and looking out into the impenetrable depths of the nocturnal sky, vibrant with twinkling stars, wherein the moon was rising—a sharp bright semicircle that cut deep into the darkness.

In the cabins, the lights had gone out one by one, like sleepy eyes that close fast: stillness reigned, disturbed only by the quiet rustling of leaves, mingling with the bubbling of the distant stream. At the miller’s alone did the windows all shine brilliantly, and the folk enjoyed themselves late into the night.

At Boryna’s all was still; everyone had gone to rest and the lights were out, except for the dying embers about the pots on the hearth, where the crickets chirped unseen; but Roch stayed up, waiting outside for Hanka. It was near midnight, when hoofs were heard beating upon the bridge by the mill, and the britzka came rolling in.

Hanka was extremely depressed and taciturn; and it was only when, supper over, Pete had gone to the stable, that Roch made bold to ask if she had seen her husband.

“All the afternoon. He is in good health and spirits, and asked me to send you a greeting. . . . I saw the other lads also.—They are to be set free, but none will tell when. Also I saw the lawyer who is to defend Antek. . . .”

She was, however, keeping back something that lay like a stone at her heart, and went on talking of other and indifferent matters: till suddenly she broke down, bursting into tears, and covering her face, while the drops came pouring through her fingers.

“I shall come to-morrow morning,” he said. “Ye need rest. You have been much shaken, and it might do you harm.”

“Oh!” she burst out; “if I could but die and have done with this agony!”

He bent his head and withdrew, saying nothing.



Hanka went at once to lie down by her children; but, tired though she was, she could not sleep. Ah! Antek had treated her as though she had been some importunate dog. He had eaten the Hallow-fare with a good appetite, taken a few roubles without asking whence she had got them, and not so much as said he was sorry the journey had tired her!

She had told him all her doings at the farm: he had listened with not a word of praise, but more than one of sharp censure. Then he had asked about all the village—and forgotten his own little ones! She had come out to him with what a faithful loving heart, with what intense yearning for his caresses! Was she not his own wife, the mother of his children? And yet he had not fondled her, nor kissed her, nor even inquired after her health. He had behaved like a stranger, and looked on her as one. At last, when she could speak no longer for the pain that strangled her, and her tears flowed forth, he had shouted: "Have you come all this way to whine and blubber at me?"—O God! the anguish of that moment! . . . And that was her reward for all the hard work she had done for him, all that toil so far beyond her strength, all her bitterness of woe!—Nothing; not one word of endearment, of comfort even!

"O Christ! look down on me in Thy mercy, for I can bear no more!" she moaned, her face pressed hard down upon the pillow, not to wake the children, as she lay there, weeping, sorrowing, full of deep humiliation and the sense of cruel wrong.

Neither in his presence, nor before anyone else afterwards, had she been able to pour forth her soul: only now did she at last give vent to the despair of her heart, and to those tears, more bitter than any bitterness on earth.

The next morning—Easter Monday—the weather was still more beautiful, the country-side more abundantly bathed in dew, in azure mist-wreaths, in sunshine and in joy. The birds' songs were more sonorous; the warm gales, rushing through the trees, made them murmur, as it were, a quiet prayer. The folk rose earlier, too, that day, opening doors

and windows wide, and going outside to gaze upon God's world—on the verdurous orchards; on the vast landscape, garlanded with spring greenery, sparkling all over with diamonds, bathed in the light of the sun; on the autumn-ploughed fields, with young tawny blades waving in the wind, and rippling up to the cabins like sheets of water teased by the zephyrs.

The boys ran about with squirts, drenching each other to the cry of *Smigus!*—or else, hiding behind the trees round the pond, they would deluge with water, not only the passers-by, but anyone who peeped out of doors; so that many a cabin-wall dripped with wet, and puddles glistened all around them.

Along all the ways and about the enclosures, the lads ran, chasing their victims with uproarious laughter, and dead set against the lasses, who enjoyed the pastime as much as they did, emptying pails on their heads and dodging them through the orchards; and as there were plenty of grown-up girls among them, these soon got the upper hand, driving the boys back with indomitable energy. Even Yasyek Topsy-turvy, who had attacked Nastka with a fire-hose, was himself tackled by the Balcerek girls, drenched from head to foot, and then flung into the pond to crown their victory.

But he, being nettled, and loath to brook such shame, that girls should get the better of a man, called to his aid Pete, Boryna's servant: who with him laid an ambush cunningly for Nastka, got her fast in their clutches, dragged her to the well, and flooded her until she screamed aloud. . . . Then, taking Vitek to help them, and young Gulbas, with some bigger lads, they pounced upon Mary, daughter of Balcerek, whom they deluged so, that, stick in hand, her mother was obliged to run and rescue her! Yagna too they caught and drenched thoroughly, nor did they spare even Yuzka, though she begged them hard, and ran in tears to Hanka to complain.

"Complain she may!" they cried; "but yet she likes it: see, her eyes sparkle with glee!"

"Pestilent fellows! they have wetted me all over!" Ya-



gustynka growled, though pleased, and entered the cabin.

"Whom will those rascals spare!" Yuzka grumbled, as she changed to dry clothes. Yet she could not for all that forbear coming out into the porch to witness the scene: all the roads alive with noise and tumult, and the whole place thrilling with the hubbub. The lads, frantic with delight, ran about in large bands, driving all who came nigh within range of the great hose, till at last the Soltys, seeing that no one could leave his hut for them, had to put an end to this merry-making, and disperse them.

"Are ye no worse for yesterday's drive?" Yagustynka queried, as she dried herself by Hanka's fire.

"I am. It moves within me with continual leaps; I feel nigh swooning!"

"Prithee, lie down, and drink a hot infusion of wild thyme.—Ye were too much shaken yesterday."

She was greatly concerned; but, scenting the reek of fried blood-pudding, sat down to breakfast with the others.

"And you too, mistress, eat ye a morsel: hunger can do no good."

"I have a loathing for meat now: I'll make myself some tea."

"That's good to cleanse the bowels; but ye'll be sooner well if ye take hot vodka, boiled with lard and spices."

"No doubt: such medicine might even raise one from the dead," Pete laughed. He had ensconced himself close to Yagna, following her eyes, offering her courteously anything she happened to look upon, and trying to enter into conversation. But she took little notice of him; and so he presently came to ask Yagustynka about the prisoners she had seen.

"I have seen them all," she said. "They are not in cells apart, but in large rooms, as in a Manor, with plenty of light and good floors. Only, at all the windows there is a sort of cobweb of iron, lest they should take a fancy to walk out of doors. As for their food, it is none of the worst. . . . I tried the pease-porridge they get at noonday. It seemed to have been boiled in an old boot, and seasoned with axle-

grease! . . . There was fried millet, too.—As to that, our dog Lapa would not have touched it, no, nor smelt at it either, but done something else, belike! . . . They have to live at their own expense; and if anyone lacks money, let him pray over his food to improve it," she wound up in her usual sour fashion.

"Some, they say, are to come back next Sunday," she added, lowering her voice with a glance at Hanka. At this, Yagna started up and left the room; and Yagustynka set to talking about Kozlova's expedition.

"They came home late, having quite failed; but they beheld sausages on every side, and had a good look round at the Manor. They inform us, it smells otherwise than do our cabins!—But the Squire said he could in no wise help them; that was the affair of the Commissioner and the Government. Even were he able, for no man of Lipka would he do aught: he was the greatest sufferer of all, and because of them!—Look you, he has been forbidden to sell the forest, and the merchants are now bringing actions against him on that account.—He swore brimstone oaths, and cried out that, if he had to be a beggar because of the peasants, he hoped the plague might destroy them all!—All the morning, Kozlova has been carrying this news from hut to hut, and threatening revenge."

"The more fool she. What harm can threats do?"

"My dear, we all know that the very weakest can find a place where to strike home!"—Here she broke off abruptly, and ran to support Hanka, who was leaning helpless against the wall.

"Good God!" she murmured in dismay; "is a miscarriage coming on?" And she put her to bed. Hanka had fainted, her face was covered with drops of perspiration, and flecked with yellowish spots; she lay scarce breathing, while the old woman dabbed her temples with vinegar. Then she put some horse-radish to her nostrils and Hanka opened her eyes and came to.

The others went to fulfil their several duties. Vitek alone remained, and when a convenient opportunity offered itself,



begged his mistress to let him take his automaton into the village.

"Well, you may; but take heed to behave yourself, and not soil your garments. Tie up the dogs, lest they run after you everywhere.—When will you start?"

"After Vespers."

Yagustynka then put her head in at the window, and said: "Where are the dogs, Vitek? I was taking food to them, but neither of them comes to eat."

"Aye, and I have not seen Lapa in the byre this morning. Hither, Burek! come hither!" he cried, running to and fro; but no bark answered his calls.

"They must," he said, "have wandered out some distance."

No one could think where the dogs had gone. After some time, however, Yuzka heard a faint whining sound, that seemed to be somewhere in the yard. Finding nothing there, she went into the orchard, fancying that Vitek was punishing some dog that had strayed on to the premises. To her surprise, no one was in sight; the place was now silent, the whining had ceased. But, going back, she stumbled over Burek's body. It lay dead close to the cabin, its head beaten in!

Her cries at once brought the whole household to the place.

"Burek has been killed—by thieves, I doubt not!"

"Surely and indeed, 'tis so!" Yagustynka screamed, seeing a lot of earth dug out, and a large pit yawning beneath the foundations.

"They have dug through, even to Father's store-room!"

"Why, a horse might have been dragged through so large a hole!"

"And the pit is sprinkled all about with grains of corn!"

"O Lord! peradventure the robbers are still in there!" Yuzka cried.

They rushed into Boryna's dwelling. Yagna had gone out; the old man lay like a log; but in the store-room that was usually dark, there now was light from the hole which had been dug, and everything within was plainly visible,

strewn about in the greatest disorder. The corn had been poured out over the floor pell-mell with articles of clothing torn down from the poles they had been stretched on; and among these, pieces of wool, unspun or spun into many a yarn and hank, lay twisted and torn and tangled.—But what had been stolen? No one could tell as yet.

Hanka nevertheless was sure this was the blacksmith's doing, and reflected with a hot flush that, had she waited but one day more, he would have found and taken the money. She bent forward over the pit to hide from all present her feelings of satisfaction.

"Is naught missing in the byre?" she asked, feigning uneasiness.

By good luck, all was right there.

"The door," Pete observed, "has been properly locked"; and, striding over to the potato-pit, he pulled out a big bundle of straw that closed the entrance, and dragged thence Lapa, alive and whining.

"The knaves thrust it in there, 'tis clear; but how could Lapa let them do it? So fierce a dog!"

"And how was it no bark was heard last night?"

They sent to inform the Soltys, and the news flew over all the village. People thronged into the orchard, the pit was as much besieged as a church confessional: everyone peeped in, looked Burek over, and gave his opinion.

Roch also came. He calmed Yuzka, who, voluble, excited, and tearful, was telling them what had occurred; then, going in to Hanka, who had lain down again, he said:

"I feared lest ye might take this too much to heart."

"Wherefore? Glory be to God, he has stolen nothing." She added, in a low voice: "For he came too late."

"Have ye any guess who it is?"

"The blacksmith! I'd lay my life on't!"

"Then—was he searching for aught in particular?"

"He was: but failed.—I name him only to you."

"Certainly.—Unless he had been taken in the very act, or ye had witnesses.—Well, well! Money makes a man dare awful things!"



"Good friend," she entreated, "not even Antek is to know of this!"

"I am not one to talk at random, as you are aware. Moreover, 'tis easier to slay than to beget.—I knew the fellow for a knave, yet would never have suspected him of that."

"Oh, he sticks at naught: well do I know him."

The Voyt, arriving with the Soltys, then set to make a thorough search, questioning Yuzka carefully.

"Were Koziol not in jail," he muttered, "I should think it to be his deed."

"Hush, Peter," the Soltys interrupted, nudging him; "there is his wife, just coming up."

"They must have been frightened away; nothing has been taken."

"We must notify the gendarmes, of course. . . . More work! Satan will not let a man rest, even in this holy time."

The Soltys bent down and picked up a bloodstained rod of iron.

"It was with this Burek was done to death."

The thing passed from hand to hand.

"It is one of those rods out of which they make tines."

"Perhaps stolen out of Michael's forge."

"The forge has been closed ever since Good Friday!"

"They may have stolen it and brought it hither: I, the Voyt, tell you so. The blacksmith is not at home: what's to be done? This is no one's business but mine—and the Soltys'!" He raised his voice and shouted at them to go home and not waste time to no purpose.

Little as they cared for his blustering, it was now time for church; so the crowd melted away quickly, for parishioners from other villages were dropping in already, and the bridge was rumbling with carts.

When all had gone, Bylitsa went out to the orchard, to look at his dog, talk to it softly, and try to coax it back to life.

Hanka remained lying alone in bed, when everybody had

gone to church, and the hut was empty. For a time she prayed and thought of Antek; then, the old man having taken the little ones out into the road, and all being very quiet, she fell fast asleep.

Time slipped away, and she was still sleeping when, near noon, the sound of the organ playing and the people singing in unison came wafted on the breeze, and the bells tolling for the Elevation made the windows vibrate. What woke her at length was the noisy clatter of the wagons driven home at full speed along the road, past holes and ruts; for on Easter Monday it is the custom to try who will be first home after High Mass. It was a confused torrent of horses, carts and people, of whips rising and falling all the way, twinkling athwart the orchard-trees. They raced so furiously that she felt the cabin tremble, as the wind bore the clatter and the din of laughter to her ears.

She had a mind to get up and take a look outside; but her people were home now, and Yagustynka set about getting dinner ready. She meanwhile related how the church had been so crammed that half the people had to stand outside; how all the Manor folk had been there; and how his Reverence had, after Mass, called all the farmers to the sacristy to confer with them. Yuzka prattled about the way the young Manor ladies were dressed.

"Know ye that the damsels of Vola wear humps on their hinder parts, and look like turkey-cocks when they put up their tails?"

"They pad themselves with hay or rags," the old woman explained.

"But their waists! They are drawn in like wasps. One might cut them in two with a whip. And where they stow away their bellies, none can say! Oh, I was close to them, and saw them well!"

"Their bellies? Why, they cram them in under their stays. A Manor servant, who had once been chambermaid at Modlitsa, told me that some of those damsels starve themselves, and gird their waists tight while they sleep, lest they should grow stout! At the Manors 'tis fashionable for girls



to be thin as laths, with only the back parts swelled out!"

"Not so with us; lads laugh raw-boned girls to scorn!"

"They are right. Our lasses should be even as ovens, all rounded out and full of such heat flowing from them that men feel warm when they come near," said Pete, his eyes feasting on Yagna, who then was removing the pots from the fire-place.

"Why, I declare!" thundered Yagustynka; "that fright! He has just had a spell of rest and a morsel of meat; and lo, he is at once hankering for something else!"

"When such a one is at work, it is a marvel her bodice does not split at every motion!" he went on; and would have served them some further specimens of his eloquence, when Dominikova, coming in to tend Hanka, drove him from the room.

They took dinner outside in the porch, where it was bright and warm. The early verdure quivered and glittered on the boughs, fluttering like butterflies; and the warbling of birds came to them from the orchard-trees.

Dominikova forbade Hanka to leave her bed. Veronka came in with her children immediately after dinner. A bench was placed close to the bed, and Yuzka brought in some portions of the Hallow-fare, and a flask of vodka sweetened with honey. Hanka, though not without difficulty, offered these (according to the dignified custom among peasants on such occasions) to her sister and to the neighbours who had dropped in to visit and sympathize, taste the vodka, nibble slowly at the sweet cakes, and talk of various topics—especially the hole dug to rob the store-room.

Outside, too, folk had come to chat with the household, and walk to and fro in the orchard, much exercised in mind at the sight of the hole, which the Voyt had not allowed to be filled up till the arrival of the scrivener and gendarmes.

Yagustynka had repeated the whole story for about the hundredth time, when the lads entered the yard with the automaton cock. Bravely attired, even to wearing boots and Boryna's cap (much on one side), Vitek led the band. After him came the others: Maciek, Klebus, Gulbas, Yen-

drek, Kuba, and the son of Gregory the Wry-mouthed. These had sticks in their hands and scrips on their backs; but under his arm Vitek bore Pete's fiddle.

They strutted out in procession, first of all to his Reverence, as the young men had done in past years, entered the garden boldly and formed up in line in front of the house, with the cock trundling before them, Vitek scraping his fiddle the while. Gulbas then, having wound up the machine, began to crow, and they all, stamping and striking the ground with their sticks, began singing in a shrill tone certain doggerel lines, winding up with an appeal for a present.

They sang for a long time, and ever louder, till his Reverence came forth, admired the cock, gave each of them a five-kopek piece, and sent them away delighted.

Vitek was sweating with fear, lest his Reverence should say something about the stork. But he seemed to have passed him over amongst his companions, and after he had retired, sent the housemaid to them with some pieces of sweet cake. Loud they raised their song of thanks, and then went on, first to the organist's, then all through the rest of the village, where they had much ado to protect their machine from rough handling and the pokes of inquisitive sticks.

Vitek, their leader, had an attentive eye to everything, stamping for them to commence singing, and signalling with his bow when to raise and when to drop their voices. In short, the whole *Dyngus* was performed with such life and spirit that their strains filled the place, and people wondered to see such mere urchins already playing so well the part of grown-ups.

It was near sunset when the big dame Ploshkova, having first gone in to see Boryna, came also to call upon Hanka.

"As ever, as ever! O Lord!—I spoke to him: no word in reply. The sun is shining on his bed, and his fingers catch at the beams, as if to play with them: just like a little baby. Ah, I could have wept to see what such a man as he has come to!" So she said, seated by Hanka's bedside; but she



drank the vodka and reached out for the cake as willingly as any.

"Does he eat anything now? He seems to have put on flesh."

"Yes, he can take a little: maybe he is getting better."

Yuzka rushed in, screaming: "They have taken the cock over to Vola!" but, seeing Ploshkova there, turned and ran out to Yagna.

Hanka called after her: "Yuzka, you must see to the kine: it is time now!"

"Yes, yes," said Ploshkova. "'A holiday is a holiday, but the belly must have its dues alway!'—The lads came to me likewise. A clever fellow that Vitek of yours, and a keen-sighted one too!"

"But ever first to play and last to work!"

"My dear, servants are never good for much. The miller's wife told me she could not keep a single girl for six months."

"They get too much new bread there—and go wrong in consequence."

"That's as it may be; but they have the journeyman to help them that way, or the son—him at school—who looks in at times; aye, and the miller himself will let none of them alone, they say. . . . 'Tis true that our servants grow bolder daily. My own herdsman, now the goodman is away, treats me shamefully and insists on milk in the afternoon! Who ever heard of such a thing?"

"Oh, I know their humours, I have a man myself. But I must agree to all he wants, else he would leave me when work is heaviest; and on such a large holding, what could I do without him?"

"Have a care they do not take him from you!" she said, lowering her voice warningly.

"Do ye know of anything intended?" Hanka exclaimed, greatly alarmed.

"Something I heard of—a rumour, peradventure a lie: I cannot say.—But I talk and talk, and forget what I have come for. Several have promised to come to my cabin for

a chat. Do you come too. All the best folk will be there: young Boryna's wife must not be away."

This was flattering; but Hanka had to excuse herself, for she felt too unwell. Ploshkova, much annoyed, went to invite Yagna. She too pretexted a previous engagement with her mother.

From outside the hut, Yagustynka's mocking voice was heard:

"Ye would fain have gone, Yagna, but ye are hankering after the lads, and there's no one at Ploshkova's but old fogies like Ambrose. No matter: they wear hose just the same as young men!"

"You! every word you say is a stab—as usual!"

"For I," she jeered, "being merry, would that all might have their desires!"

Trembling with rage, Yagna left the house, staring vacantly in front of her, and scarce able to choke down her tears. *It was true*; the longing she felt was intolerable.

What though the very air told of the feast-day, and folk swarmed to and fro, and the village resounded with shouts of laughter, and echoed to the songs of women seen far away, crimson against the grey sown fields? She laboured none the less under a deep oppression, an unbearable sadness of craving, which she had been suffering ever since the morning. To drive it off, she had gone round to her acquaintances, taken long walks along the roads and meadows, even changed her clothes twice or thrice: all would not do. Still, and yet more intensely, did she pine to go somewhere, do something, seek . . . she knew not what!

And now she wandered out upon the poplar road, gazing at the huge red disk, slowly descending and throwing streaks of light and shadow athwart the highway.

The cool of twilight soon began to envelop her, though the still warm breath of the plain filled her with a thrilling rhythmical sense of pleasure. The noises of the village came faintly to her ears, and the fiddle, wailing mournfully, smote upon her heart-strings.



On she went: whither and urged by what, she could not say.

She sometimes moaned heavily, sometimes motioned with her hands as she roved, sometimes stopped short, helpless, darting fiery glances round her. And then she walked on farther, weaving thoughts as subtle and impalpable as gossamer, or those threads of light upon the water which disappear at the touch of the hand. She looked sunwards, and saw—nothing: the rows of poplars before her seemed blurred, and as if seen in memory only. But she was mightily conscious of her own Self, and of something possessing that Self, making it smart and cry out and shed tears; of something that was carrying her away, making her wish she could take the wings of the birds she saw flying westward, and sail with them whithersoever they went. She felt in the grip of a Power instinct with burning tenderness, that forced tears from her as well as flames. . . . And on her way she plucked at the poplar-shoots, to cool her parched lips and her eyes that shot fire!

Now and again she would sink down beneath some tree, rest her chin upon her hands, and fall into a day-dream. . . .

All this was the spring, singing, as it were, its glowing hymn within her, pervading all her being, working in it as it does in the fruitful fields, in the trees swelling with young sap that burst into a song of life as soon as the sunbeams warm them.

She tottered along, her eyes tingling, her fainting limbs barely able to support her any more. And a new desire came over her: to weep aloud, to dance, to roll amongst those soft fleeces of growing corn, cool with pearly dews; and then again she craved to leap in among the brambles, dash through the thorny copses, and feel the sweet wild tearing pain of wrestling and of strife!

Suddenly she turned back, and, hearing the sound of a violin, went in that direction. Ha! how everything was seething wildly within her, and brimming over with such abnormal excitement that she had a mind to leap about, to

revel in some close-crowded tavern, even to drink herself to death—what did she care?

Upon the way from the churchyard to the poplar road, now quite drowned in the ruddy rays of sundown, someone was coming along, book in hand, and had stopped beneath a clump of silver birches.

It was Yanek, the organist's son.

She tried to get a glimpse at him through the trees, but he caught sight of her.

She was minded to run, but her feet seemed rooted to the ground, and her eyes were fixed on him as one fascinated. He came forward smiling, and showing white teeth between rosy lips: a tall stripling, slender, and of milk-white complexion.

"Did ye not know me, Yagna?"

His voice struck a chord that resounded somewhere within her.

"How could I fail to? . . . But yet ye are somehow different, Yanek, not quite the same."

"Why, of course, as we grow, we surely must change.—Have you been to see someone at Budy?"

"Nay, only wandering about: ye know, Eastertide does not end till to-morrow."—Touching his book with her hand, "Religious, is it?" she asked him.

"Not in the least. 'Tis of far-off lands and the seas that surround them."

"Heavens! of the seas? What, then are not the pictures ye have there images of the saints?"

"See!" He opened the book before her, showing the illustrations. With heads bent down, touching almost, they stood there, shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip, inadvertent. Now and then he explained some picture; and she was enraptured, raising her eyes to admire him, not daring to breathe for emotion. Now they pressed closer still, for the sun was under the forest, and it was hard to make out the pictures.

All of a sudden, a shudder went through him; he shrank



back a little, murmuring: "Twilight has fallen; 'tis time to go home."

"Let us go, then."

So they went on in silence, and almost unseen in the shadows. Now the after-glow had faded, and dusk was trailing its bluish haze over all the fields. That day no gorgeous sunset blazed in the western sky, but through the tall poplars the daylight was seen to die away in a bright expanse of gold.

"Is it true, what they print there?" Yagna inquired of him, stopping awhile.

"'Tis true: every word true!"

"Lord! such vast waters, such wonderful countries! 'tis hard to believe it."

"Nevertheless, 'tis the truth, Yagna," he whispered, and looked kindly into her eyes, and so close that she held her breath, and a shiver passed through her frame. She bent forward with a gesture as of one who yields all, expecting him to embrace her, pressed to the bole of a tree hard by, and was opening her arms to him, when he suddenly started back, saying: "I must be off: it is late. Farewell, Yagna!" and vanished.

Many minutes elapsed before Yagna could move from the spot.

"What! has the boy cast a spell on me? What is this that I feel now?" she wondered, as she dragged along slowly, with her brain in a whirl, and strange tremors running all through her.

Passing the tavern, she caught the muffled sounds of the music and conversations. She looked in at the window. Mr. Yacek, standing in the middle of the room, was sawing away at his violin. Ambrose, reeling close to the bar, was talking loud to the *Komorniki* and from time to time reaching out his hand for a glass.

Someone caught her by the waist unexpectedly: she screamed and tried to wrench herself loose.

"I have you now, nor will I let you go.—Come for a drink with me!" It was the voice of the Voyt, who held her firm

in his grasp; and they both went by a side-door into the tavern parlour.

No one had seen them, for few were out in the road, and it was very dark.

Now the village was quiet: all the outside sounds were hushed and the crofts were empty and silent. Everybody was at home. Eastertide, that dear time of rest, was nearly over; and the toilsome morrow was lurking outside on the threshold, already baring its sharp fangs for them.

Lipka therefore was rather melancholy and subdued that evening: only at Ploshka's was there a numerous party. Her neighbours had come together and were conversing with dignified mien. The Voyt's wife sat in the place of honour: by her side Balcerek's wife, stout and loud-mouthed, was maintaining her opinion: close to her sat Sikora's dame, raw-boned as heretofore; Boryna's cousin, much given to babbling; and the blacksmith's wife, her babe at her breast; and the Soltysova, talking in low devout tones: and, in short, all the foremost women in the village.

As they sat there solemnly, stiff and formal of mien, one was somehow reminded of a lot of brooding hens with ruffled plumage. They wore their best holiday attire: kerchiefs let half-way down the back (Lipka-fashion), and great frills standing higher than their ears, with all their possessions in the way of coral beads hung over them. They enjoyed themselves, however, after their slow fashion, and their good humour increased little by little, as their cheeks grew flushed. And presently, tucking up their petticoats carefully, lest they should crumple them, they edged nearer and nearer to one another, and soon were engaged in more than one wordy tussle.

But after the smith, who said he was but just back from town, had joined them, they waxed merrier still. The fellow was a rare talker; and being rather tipsy, he began to humbug them with such comical mystification that he made them hold their sides with laughter. The whole room was in a roar, and he himself laughed so loud that they could hear him at Boryna's.



The party lasted a long while, and Ploshka had to send three times to the tavern for vodka.

At Boryna's they sat in the court-yard. Hanka had risen and joined them, with a sheepskin coat over her shoulders to protect her from the chill night air.

So long as there was light enough, Roch read to them; but when darkness had fallen over the land, he went on to tell them many a thing of wonder that they were most curious to hear. The dusk soon became so deep that the party were barely outlined on the white cabin-walls. It was cool outside, and no stars shone; a dull stillness, broken only by the bubbling waters and barking dogs, pervaded the place.

They all were together in one group—Nastka and Yuzka, Veronka and her babes, Klembova and Pete, seated almost at Roch's feet: Hanka was sitting on a stone, a little apart.

He told them much about the history of Poland, and also many a holy legend, and tales of the wonderful things in the world, of which he related so many a marvel that no one could remember all he said.

They listened motionless and hushed, drinking in those honey-sweet words of his, as the parched earth drinks in the warm raindrops.

And he, barely seen in the gloom, spoke in a low solemn voice words such as these:

"To all who await spring in prayer and toil and readiness, it surely cometh at the end of winter. . . .

"In the end, the oppressed ever triumph: therefore have ye trust. . . .

"Man's happiness is a field to be sown with blood and sacrifice and labour: whoso has sown it thus shall see the crop grow and shall reap the harvest. . . .

"But he that careth only for daily bread shall not sit at the table of our Lord. . . .

"Who only complaineth of evil, and doth no good, he maketh the evil worse."

He spoke long, but in words of wisdom hard to bear in mind; in a voice ever lower and more loving he spoke, until

the darkness quite swallowed him up. Then it seemed as though some holy being were speaking from beneath the ground: as though the dead ancestors of the Borynas, graciously permitted to revisit the earth at this sacred Eastertide, were now uttering words of solemn warning to their descendants, out of those crumbling walls, those bent gnarled trees, that thick dense gloom around.

Over all these utterances their minds pondered deeply; like a bell in the depth of their hearts they resounded, arousing within them dim emotions—strange, eerie, unaccountable desires.

They did not so much as remark that all the dogs in the village had set to barking, nor that the feet of many people were running fast.

"Fire! Podlesie is burning!" a voice cried to them from beyond the orchard.

It was true. The farm buildings of the Manor domain of Podlesie were on fire, and crimson-red bushes of flame were growing in the night.

"Heaven save the mark!" Yagustynka ejaculated, as the memory of Kozlova's threats flashed through her brain.

"A judgment of God upon him!"

"For the wrong he has done us!" many voices cried in the dark.

Doors slammed; the folk, half clad, ran out, and crowded more and more numerous on the bridge by the mill, from where the conflagration could best be seen. In a few minutes the whole village was there.

The farm stood on a hill-side close to the forest, a few versts away from Lipka, whence the increase of the fire was plainly visible. On the black background of the wood, the fiery tongues now multiplied, and dark-red rolling volumes of smoke burst forth. There was no wind, and the conflagration leaped straight up, higher and higher: the buildings burned like bundles of resinous fire-wood; and a ruddy flickering blaze swept up into the shadows of the night, with pillars of dark, towering smoke.



The air was soon rent by the sound of agonized bellowing. "Their cattle-shed is on fire: they can save but few, for there is but one door!"

"Ah, the cornstacks are burning now!"

Others cried out, in consternation: "So are the barns!"

The priest, the smith, the Soltys, and the Voyt (though in his cups, and barely able to stand) came on the scene, crying out to the people to rush to the rescue.

No one hastened to move. A savage growl ran through the multitude:

"Let our lads be freed, and they will save the farm!"

Imprecations, threats, and even the priest's tearful entreaties, were all of no avail. They stood gazing stolidly on the fire with sombre looks, and remained immovable.

Kobusova even shook her fist at the Manor servants she could see. "Those sons of dogs!" she shrieked.

Only the Voyt, the Soltys, and the smith drove over to the fire at last; and that without any appliances, the peasants refusing to let them take so much as a bucket with them.

"The dirty scoundrel who touches one of them shall be cudgelled to death!" they all shouted in chorus.

The whole village was there in a close-packed crowd, down to the youngest, busily soothing the cries of infants in arms. Few spoke. All looked on, greedily feasting their eyes and hearts, enjoying the thought that the Lord had punished the Squire for the wrong done them.

It burned on far into the night, but no one went home. They waited patiently till all was over, till the whole farm was one sea of fire, and the burning thatches and shingles flew up and came down in a red rain, and the vermilion reflections from the great sheets of fire waving in the dark, tinged the tree-tops and the mill-roof, and threw a faint glimmer on the pond, strewn as it were with dull glistening embers.

Rolling carts, men's shouts, the din of bellowing, and fearful threats of destruction, echoed through the village:

and still there the people stood like a living wall, feeding their eyes and souls with vengeance.

But there arose from outside the tavern old Ambrose's husky drunken voice, continually singing the same unvarying song!



## CHAPTER VI

IT was a strange piece of news that Hanka heard the next morning; one that made her start up in bed. But Yagustynka luckily caught hold of her in time, and pressed her down on the pillow.

"Hold ye still! Is the cabin afire?"

"But he says such things!—He must be mad!"

"Nay," Bylitsa replied, stooping to sneeze after an abundant pinch of snuff; "nay, I am in my right mind, and what I say I know. Since yesterday, Mr. Yacek is my lodger!"

"Hear ye? He has quite lost his wits! . . . Pray look whether they are not coming home yet: it must be starved, my new-born!"

The old woman went on tidying and sanding the room.

Hanka's father sneezed so violently that he was thrown back on to a bench.

"Ye're loud as the trumpet that tells the time in the market-place."

"Ah, because it is strong snuff: Mr. Yacek gave me a whole packet!"

It was early. The sun, bright and warm, looked into the cabin; the orchard trees waved; through the half-open door appeared the straight necks of geese, with coral beaks at the end; and a whole family of muddled and noisy goslings tried to scramble over the high threshold. Thereupon a dog growled: the geese screamed, and brooding hens in the passage cackled in alarm, and began to flutter out of their nests.

"Please drive them to the orchard; they will have grass to pluck, at any rate."

"I will, Hanka, I will, and see that no hawk come nigh them."

"What are the farm-lads about?" she asked, after some time.

"Oh, Pete is ploughing the potato-fields close to the hillock, and Vitek harrowing our field of flax."

"Is that land still wet!"

"It is: clogs stick fast; but it will dry speedily, when harrowed."

"I may perchance leave my bed, ere the land can be sown."

"Oh, have a care for yourself just now. Do not fear lest anyone steal your work!"

"Have the kine been milked?"

"By me! Yagna had set the pails outside the byre, and gone away."

"She runs about Lipka continually, like a dog: a useless woman on whom there is no counting.—Tell Kobusova I will let her have the cabbage-patches. Pete will take her manure, and plough it in; but she must work four days a week for every field. Half to be done when we plant the potatoes, and the other half in harvest-time."

"Kozlova would gladly take the flax-fields on the same terms."

"She would not do: too lazy.—Let her seek elsewhere: last year she wagged her tongue against Father all through the village, saying he had treated her unfairly."

"Please yourself: yours is the land, do as ye will with it.—Ah! Filipka came for potatoes yesterday, while you were lying in."

"To be paid for in cash?"

"No, in work. In that hut there is no money: they are starving."

"Let her have a bushel now. If she wants more, she must wait till we have done planting them. I cannot say how much we shall have to spare. Yuzka will go and measure out a bushel for her.—Though Filipka is but a poor worker."



"Whence should she get the strength? Too little food, too little sleep, and every year a baby!"

"Hard times! Harvest over the hills and far away, and dearth at our thresholds!"

"Thresholds, say ye? Nay, within doors, and choking the life out of us!"

"Have you let the sow loose?"

"She is lying by the wall.—A splendid farrow, and each one as round as a roll."

Here Bylitsa appeared in the doorway.

"I have left the geese among the gooseberry-bushes," he said.—"Well, who should come to me at Easter but Mr. Yacek, saying: 'I will live with you, Bylitsa, be your lodger, and pay you well'? I thought he was flouting me, as the gentry are wont to flout the peasant folk; so I replied: 'Oh, I don't mind getting a little money, and I have a room to spare.'—He laughed, gave me a packet of snuff (prime Petersburg quality), looked round my place and said: 'If you can abide here, so can I; and I'll fix up your hut so that it will soon look like one of our houses!'"

"Well, I declare!" said the old woman in amazement. "Such a great man—own brother to the Squire!"

"So he made himself a bed of straw beside mine—and there you are! When I went out, he was on the door-step, smoking a cigarette, and throwing some corn to sparrows."

"But what will he have to eat?"

"He has some pots with him, and is continually making and drinking tea."

"There must be something underneath all this. One so high-placed would not do this without some reason."

"The reason is that he has lost his reason! All men seek and strive to better themselves: why should one such as he strive to be worse off? Only because his wits are gone," said Hanka, raising her head, for voices were heard within the enclosure.

They were coming back from the christening. Yuzka opened the march, with the baby, swaddled in a pillow, and covered with a shawl; then came Dominikova escorting

it, then the Voyt and Ploshkova, the godfather and godmother; and, last of all, Ambrose limping along after them.

But before entering, Dominikova took up the child, and, crossing herself, carried it all round the cabin, stopping at each corner according to some old prehistoric rite, and saying:

"From the East cometh Wind.

"From the North cometh Cold.

"From the West cometh Night.

"From the South cometh Heat.

"And on every side, O human soul, beware of evil, and put thy trust in God alone."

"H'm!" laughed the Voyt; "that Dominikova seems such a pious one, but she's a famous warlock all the same!"

"Truly," Ploshkova replied, "prayers do good; but all know that a few charms thrown in do no hurt."

They entered all together. Dominikova undid the child, and put it, stark naked and red as a crayfish, into its mother's arms.

"O Mother, we bring you a real Christian, who in holy baptism has received the name of Roch. May he live and thrive and be your consolation!"

"And may he beget a dozen young Rochs! A roaring fellow he is! No need was there to pinch him at christening; and how he spat the salt out!"

The little one was wailing and kicking out its legs upon the feather-bed. Dominikova wiped its eyes and mouth and forehead with some drops of vodka; and only then did she allow Hanka to take it to her breast. To this it at once turned, clung ravenously, and was hushed.

Hanka then thanked the godfather and godmother very heartily, kissing them and the others present, and excusing herself that the christening was not such as befitted the son of a Boryna.

"Then have another one next year," said the Voyt, merrily, wiping his moustache, for the vodka glass was coming his way; "and that one will make up for this."



Here Ambrose blurted out thoughtlessly: "A christening without the father is like a sin without absolution!"

This opened the floodgates of Hanka's grief, until the women presently drank to comfort her, and gathered her into their arms with great compassion. Presently she was soothed, begged their pardons, and asked them to take something to eat. And, indeed, a great dish of scrambled eggs and minced sausage was spreading its fragrance through the air.

It was Yagustynka who served the visitors, for Yuzka was crooning to the new-born child, rocking it to sleep in the large kneading-trough, for the old cradle had lost its rockers.

Long did spoon after spoon go tinkling into the dish, nobody speaking the while.

Children were crowding outside in the passage, and more and more little heads came peeping into the room; so the Voyt flung a handful of caramels out into the yard to them, for which they had many a scramble and fight.

"Why, even Ambrose has lost his tongue," Yagustynka said, being the first to speak.

"Ah, he is thinking of a farm for our man-child to run . . . and a girl for him to court!"

"To find the land is the father's business: to find the girl be ours," said the godfather.

"Of them there is no lack at all. They are thrown at your heads, with a dowry besides for the one ye may choose!"

"I fancy the Voyt's wife is thinking of another child: I saw her the other day airing her dead babe's clothes on the hedgerow."

"Belike the Voyt has promised her a christening in autumn."

"And, being such an able official, has surely not forgotten the needful for its fulfilment."

"Oh, yes," he answered gravely; "to be cheerful, a cabin must have a racket of children!"

"They do indeed give much trouble, but are pledges of hope and comfort."

"Very fine!" growled Yagustynka.—"But even gold may be bought too dear!"

"True, some children are evil, and set their parents at naught. But 'tis a hard law: 'As the dam is, so the lamb is'; and 'one reaps what one has sown,'" Dominikova replied.

Yagustynka, feeling the application of the words to herself, was infuriated.

"Ye may well jeer at others, having such gentle boys, who spin and milk and wash the pots as well as the best-trained wench."

"Because they have been bred up in the right way—the way of obedience."

"And they are as like their father as any picture—even to offering their cheeks to the smiter! Aye, 'as the dam is, so the lamb is': ye have spoken truly. And I remember your deeds with the lads in your young days: small wonder, then, that Yagna goes your way, and imitates you so well. If," she hissed in her ear, "a wooden post—topped with a man's hat, set on it jauntily—should ask her, she were too good-natured to say No!" Dominikova turned deadly pale and bowed her head down as the words were spat forth.

Just then Yagna was going through the passage. Hanka called her in to take a drink. She complied, but, without even glancing at anyone, went out and into her own rooms.

The Voyt awaited her return, but in vain, and was visibly disappointed.

He had little more to say to the others; and when she came out again and went into the court-yard, his eyes wandered stealthily after her.

The talk began to flag. The two older ones sat glowering and glaring at each other, while Ploshkova whispered something in Hanka's ear. Ambrose alone was faithful to the bottle, and though no one took any notice of him, talked on and told of things incredible.

The Voyt shortly took his leave, making as if to go home; but he whipped round through the orchard into the yard, where Yagna was sitting on the byre-step, giving a mottled calf her finger to suck.



He peered cautiously round, and putting some caramels into her bosom:

"Take these, Yagna," he said; "and come to the private bar this evening; you shall have something still better."

And without awaiting her reply he hurried back to the cabin.

"Aha!" he cried; "ye have there a goodly bull-calf, I see: 'twill fetch a high price."

"No, we keep it for breeding: it comes of good Manor stock."

"And a splendid profit ye'll have of it: the miller's bull is good for nothing now. How pleased Antek will be to see the money flow in!"

"Ah me! when will he see that? when?"

"In no long time. It is I who tell you so: trust me."

"We all are waiting wearily from day to day!"

"And any day they may be back—all of them; and I know something of these matters, I fancy."

"But the fields will not wait: that is the worst of it."

"And ah! when I look forward to autumn . . ."

A cart rattled by. Yuzka peeped out and announced that it was the priest, along with Roch, bound for somewhere.

"To purchase wine for the Mass," Ambrose explained.

"And why," Yagustynka asked with a sneer, "has he rather chosen Roch to try it with him than Dominikova?"

The latter had no time to retort: just then, in came the smith, and the Voyt raised his glass.

"Michael, you are late; come and make up for lost time!"

"I shall soon catch you up: here they come to take you from us!"

Even as he spoke, the Soltys rushed in breathless.

"Away, Peter; the scrivener and the gendarmes need you."

"Mother of a dog! what, not an instant of rest? . . . Well, duty first!"

"Get rid of them quick and rejoin us."

"Can it be done? There's the Podlesie fire business, and they come, too, about the hole dug here."

He went out with the Soltys. Then Hanka, fixing her eyes on the smith:

"They will come," she said, "to take informations. Tell them *all*, Michael."

He scratched his moustache, and eyed the child with much apparent attention.

"What can I say? Just as much as Yuzka could."

"I shall not send the girl to an official: 'twould be unseemly. But say to them, you, that, so far as we can tell, naught has been stolen from the store-room. Whether this be so or not, no one knows but God . . . and . . ."—She broke off, stroking the feather-bed with a nervous cough, disguising the mockery she felt visible on her face. He replied only with a shrug, and went out.

"Oh, the dishonest knave!" she said to herself, smiling softly.

"Because the christening was a poor one, they have broken it up quite," Ambrose grumbled, taking up his cap to go.

"Yuzka, cut a piece of sausage: he can celebrate the christening at home."

"Am I a man to eat dry sausage?"

"Then moisten your inwards with vodka now, and stop grumbling."

"They were wise who said: 'Count the grains of barley put in the pot, but look not at your fingers when they work, nor count the glasses drunk at any festival!'"

They continued talking and drinking for a time, till the Soltys came round to all the cabins, ordering the people to meet the scrivener and gendarmes at the Voyt's.

This put Ploshkova in a passion. Setting her arms akimbo, she began to storm.

"Not one jot do I care for the Voyt's commands! Is it any business of ours? Have we invited them to come? Have we time for gendarme-parties, say? We do not come to heel to the first that whistles: no dogs are we! If they want to know aught, let them come and inquire. . . . 'Tis the only thing to do. . . . No, we do not go!" And with



that she ran out into the road, shouting to a group of terrified women who had come together by the mill-pond:

"To your work, neighbours; to the fields! whoso has to do with any goodwife should know where to seek her!—Let us not wait upon them, as if we were going to give all up at their command, and sit like dogs at their doors! The rascals!"—So she screamed, being mightily ruffled in spirit.

Now as she was, after Borynova, the foremost goodwife in Lipka, the women obeyed her, and dispersed in all directions like frightened hens; and as the most part had already been in the fields since dawn, the village now seemed empty, except for the little ones playing about the pond, and the old people basking in the sun.

Of course the scrivener was furious, and loaded the Soltys with a profusion of insults; but he had to go to the fields all the same. There he plodded to and fro for a long time, asking each whether they knew anything about the fire in Podlesie. They told him just as much as he himself already knew; for what he wants to keep to himself, who would let a gendarme know?

The whole time till noon was lost in floundering about most villainous roads, and at times getting dirtied up to the waist with mire; for the fields were still very muddy here and there.

Their exasperation was therefore at its height when the scrivener arrived at Boryna's hut to draw up a statement of facts concerning the pit dug there. He was swearing like a trooper; and, chancing to meet Bylitsa in the porch, he rushed at him, shaking his fists and shrieking:

"You hound's face, you! Wherefore do you not watch, when robbers dig under your hut, eh?" And he proceeded to mention Bylitsa's mother, with the foulest outrage.

"Mind the business you have to do: I am no servant of yours! D'ye hear!" the old man, grievously offended, broke in.

At this the scrivener roared: "Hold your tongue when you speak to an official, or I'll jail you for contempt!"

But the old man's blood was boiling. He drew himself up, and cried in a hoarse voice, and with blazing eyes:

"And who are you? A servant of the public, paid by the public! Then do what the Voyt commands you, and let us free peasants alone!—Look at him! That scribbling fellow there! He has grown fat on our bread, and now would fain ride roughshod over folk!—But you have your superiors to account to, and they can punish you!"

Here the Voyt and Soltys came forward to pacify him, for he had worked himself up so, that his fingers were twitching for some weapon at hand.

"You! set down a fine for me: I'll pay it, and toss you a coin for vodka besides, if I am so minded," he called out.

But the clerk paid no more heed to him, and was taking notes of everything, and inquiring into every detail of the occurrence: while the old man rambled about the place, muttering, peeping into corners, and quite unable to come to himself. He even gave a kick to the dog!

When all was over, they would willingly have taken a morsel; but Hanka sent them word that she was just then short of bread and milk: only a few potatoes remained from breakfast.

They accordingly repaired to the tavern, loading Lipka with all imaginable maledictions.

"Ye did well, Hanka," the old man said; "and they can do nothing to you.—Why, the old Squire, though I was his serf then, and he had the right, would never, never have insulted me so!"

In the early afternoon, news came that they were still in the tavern, and the Soltys had given orders to bring Kozlova to him.

"He may as well run after the wind in the plain!" Yagustynka said, scornfully.

"No doubt she is in the forest, seeking dry fire-wood."

"No; she has been in Warsaw since yesterday. She went to get children from the hospital, and is to bring over a couple. Foundlings, I suppose."



"Yes, and let them die of starvation, as she did those she had two years ago," said Hanka.

"Poor things! Perhaps it is better so; they will not have to drag out a long life of misery."

"Aye, but even a bastard is of human blood, and 'tis no light thing to answer for their lives to God, as she must."

"But," Yagustynka pleaded, "she does not starve them of set purpose: oft she has not enough for herself; whence can she get food for them?"

"She has not taken them out of charity; she has been paid for their keep!" replied Hanka, sternly.

"Fifty *zloty* a head per year is no great sum."

"It is nothing. She drinks it all at once, and the little ones starve!"

"Not all of them.—Your Vitek, for instance, and another lad now in a hut in Modlitsa."

"Oh, but Father took Vitek from her when he could hardly toddle; and the other was in like case."

"Am I defending Kozlova? Nay, but only telling you things as I see them. Something the poor creature must earn, since she has naught to eat."

"Surely: her goodman is away, and so can steal naught for her."

"And then she made but a sorry business with Agata. That old thing, instead of dropping off—what does she do but get quite well again and leave her? And now she grumbles all over the village that every day Kozlova upbraided her for living on, to her loss!"

"She will no doubt return to the Klembas: where else should she take shelter?"

"She is offended with them. Klembova would have kept her because of her bedding and ready money. But she would not stay, had her locker taken over to the Soltys', and is now looking for a hut to die in peacefully."

"She'll not die yet. There's work for her everywhere, if only geese to tend.—Now, where in the world has Yagna gone?"

"She's at the organist's, belike, embroidering a frill for the daughter."

"As if there was too little to do here!"

"Ever since Easter," said Yuzka in a tone of complaint, "she has been there continually."

"I'll give her a lesson she will remember.—Let me look at baby."

She took it to bed with her, and as soon as dinner was done, sent everyone off to work. Soon she was alone in the room, listening to the children playing outside under Bylitsa's eye, and thinking how old Boryna lay gazing at the sunbeams that streaked the counterpane, trying to catch at them with his fingers, and babbling vague incoherent words, like an infant.

The village was deserted, for—the weather being first-rate—all who could had gone out to work.

Since Easter, it had been warmer and brighter every day.

And the days were lengthening out: misty at dawn, hot though cloudy at noon, and gorgeous with burning sunsets: true spring days.

Some, cool, bright, clear, passed by in quiet beauty, with a sprinkling of yellow dandelions, white daisies, and green buds coming out all over the willows.

And some were downright hot—burning hot; moist, soaked in sunlight, smelling of all fresh scents, and pregnant with such mighty power that when at evening the birds were still and the villagers asleep, one almost felt the upward thrust of life in the roots and growing corn, the hushed rustling of the opening buds, and the motions of all the creatures now coming forth into God's world.

But there were other days, too, totally unlike these.

Sunless, foggy, of a livid grey, with bellying clouds low down in an air so dense that it turned the head like strong drink; and the trees tossed and rocked, and all things swelled with indistinct cravings towards they knew not what: men only longed to shout, to yawn, to roll about the wet meadows of lush grass, like the silly dogs around them!

Then there were days of rain, that commenced with



dawn, with a hempen funeral pall over everything, making the roads invisible, as were the cabins too, buried in their drenched orchards. And steadily it fell, in regular tremulous grey threads that seemed unwound from an unseen spindle between sky and earth; while everything bent patiently beneath the streaming downpour, and hearkened to the many-voiced bubbling of the rills, white with foam, that ran down the dark-hued fields.

But this was a customary thing, to which no one paid heed, all going forth to work at peep of day, and coming home late in the dusk, having had scarce time enough to swallow a morsel and breathe awhile.

For whole days, then, Lipka stood abandoned, with only a few old people to guard it. Sometimes a *Dziad* would drag his aged limbs along the way, or a cart jog on to the mill; then all was deserted once more, and Lipka stood plunged in the ever-thickening greenery of its orchards.

So the days crawled by, full of hard toil, not always warm, sometimes even snowy. Small wonder if there was no noise or quarrelling in the place: they had no time for that, and every neck was bent beneath the heavy yoke of labour.

As soon, then, as morning opened its heavy eyes, and the first lark piped up, the whole village sprang to its feet with noise and din and cries of children and screams of driven geese; horses were brought out and harnessed to the plough, potatoes carted away to the fields in sacks—and lo! all was silent anew! Even Holy Mass had but a scanty attendance, and often the organ, played in an empty church, was heard only by those in the neighbouring fields, and men knelt down there to say their morning prayers when the tinkling bell announced the beginning of the service.

All worked hard: yet the land seemed as untouched as when they were not there. Only a close observer could have descried here and there a plough, with horses straining forwards along the furrows—a cart moving on the field-paths—or women, like red caterpillars, digging away in the vast plain under the bright vault of sky.

Around them, in all the hamlets visible above the orchard-tops—white walls on a blue-grey background—the air vibrated with roars and shouts and songs of toilers. To the very hills at the sky-line, the eye could see hosts of peasants, sowing or guiding the plough, and folk busy planting potatoes, and pillars of dust rising up on sandy soil wherever the harrow passed.

The Lipka lands alone, smitten as it were with the scourge of barrenness, made a mournful exception. There they lay, alas! all but fallow; for ten women, were they to strive and sweat from daybreak till night, could not do so much as one single man.

By themselves, for what were they fit? Only for delving or hoeing, to plant potatoes or flax. Over the rest of the lands the partridges piped undisturbed, ever bolder and bolder; or a hare would be seen running, but so deliberately that you could count the white flashes of its scut; or flocks of crows would fly flapping over slope and hummock.

What though the days were marvellously fine, rising like golden monstrances dipped in silver light? What though, luxuriant in verdure, they brimmed over with warm fragrance, and were made melodious by the voices of many birds, where every ditch was all full of the gold of the dandelions; where every field-path was transformed into a green ribbon embroidered with daisies, and the vast plain sprinkled all over as with a rosy dust of flowers? What though each tree was oozing and dripping with the most lovely verdure, and the whole world simmered, bubbling over with the great seething of the spring!

For round Lipka the lands lay untilled, unsown, unmanured, like lusty young swains basking lazy in the sunshine: and on their rich fruitful surface, instead of corn, wild marjorams began to peep forth, thistles grew apace, rusty sorrel plants rose up; the charlock spread amongst the autumn-ploughed fields, and mulleins and burdocks swarmed in the stubble. All those parasites of the farmers' crops, taking courage, were now creeping on far and wide, and where they had hitherto skulked about in fear and



trembling, they came up boldly and grew fast, invading and conquering the ground, furrow by furrow.

It was depressing to look upon, that waste and lonely land!

It seemed as though the forests, bending down from the hills they crowned; and the brooklets that wound timidly through those deserted plots and patches; and the black-thorn thickets already swelling with their white flower-buds; and the wild pear-trees, scattered along the field-paths; and the birds of passage; and the solitary wanderer from foreign parts; and even the crosses and statues of saints that watched by the roadsides—as though they were all looking on astounded, and inquiring of the sunny days and the plots running to waste:

“Whither have the peasants gone? Those songs, those bursts of merriment, where are they? What has come over Lipka?”

The women’s wailing alone told them all.

So things went on, with no change for the better, rather for the worse; because the women, unable to get even with the home-work, came more rarely to the fields.

At Boryna’s, indeed, things went on as usual, though more slowly than before and not so well, since Pete had never been accustomed to that sort of work; but they went on somehow, and there were hands enough to labour.

From her bed, Hanka directed all, and with such shrewdness and energy that even Yagna was obliged to bear a hand along with the others. And Hanka took thought for everything—for the live stock—for the sick man—for the time to plough, for the seeds and where to sow them—and for the little ones, whom Bylitsa, having fallen ill, had not been able to care for since the christening. She lay alone all day long, seeing no one but her people at dinner-time and in the evening, and Dominikova who looked in once a day. None of the neighbours, not even Magda, gave sign of life, and Roch was no longer heard of: since his departure with the priest, he had not come back. She was utterly weary of lying in bed; and, in order to recover more quickly, she

no longer grudged herself fat victuals, eggs, and meat. She even had a fowl killed to make broth! True, it was far too old to lay eggs: but would have brought a couple of *zloty* in the market, all the same.

In consequence, she got well so speedily that she was on her legs by Low Sunday, and resolved (in spite of all dissuasions) to have her "churching." So she went to church with Ploshkova at once after High Mass.

She was still very shaky on her legs, though, and had to lean on her companion's arm.

"It smells of spring so, my head is whirling."

"That will pass off in a day or two."

"Why, a month's change has come about in a week!"

"Spring rides a swift horse; there is no overtaking it."

"How green all round is, O Lord! how green!"

Yes: over every orchard there floated a cloud of verdure, and nothing was seen of the huts except the white tops of the chimneys. Deep in the thickets, the birds were twittering with all their might; and genial breezes came up from the fields beneath, made the weeds in the hedges wave, and the mill-pond ripple and eddy.

"The buds are big on the cherry-trees: soon we shall see the blossoms."

"We shall have plenty of fruit, unless a sharp frost nips them."

"There is an old saying: 'When the harvest is rare, there'll be fruit and to spare.'"

"I fear it looks like that for Lipka," she sighed; and the tears dimmed her eyes as she glanced at the unsown fields.

The "churching" was soon over; for the baby roared amain, and Hanka was presently so tired that she had to lie down at once on her return. But she had not lain a breathing-space, when Vitek rushed in, crying:

"Mistress, the Tsiganes! the Tsiganes are coming!"

"Evil news, in truth! Have we not enough to plague us?—Call Pete; let him lock all the doors, lest they make off with anything." And she went out in great alarm.



In a short time, the whole gang was all over the place: black-avised, in rags and tatters, with infants carried on their backs, these beggars, importunate beyond all measure, were running about everywhere, offering to tell fortunes, and even trying to make their way into the huts by force. There were but ten of them, but they made as much noise as a whole village.

"Yuzka! drive the geese and hens into the yard, and take the children within doors; they might be stolen!"

Down she sat in the porch to watch; and, perceiving a Tsigane woman trying to enter the enclosure, set the dog on her.

Lapa attacked her with savage pertinacity, and would not be driven off, though the hag lifted her staff at him and muttered sundry words and curses of magic might.

"Your curses, they are less than naught to me, you thief!"

"There would be no spells cast on us at all if ye let her come in," said Yagna, who looked annoyed.

"No, but our things would be stolen! There is no safety against such a creature, even should your eyes follow her hands all the time!—and if ye want your fortune told, why, go ye after her."

She had shrewdly guessed at the unspoken desire of Yagna, who ran out into the village, and followed the Tsiganes about all the afternoon. Unable either to free herself of a vague dread, or to overcome her curiosity to know the future, she returned to the cabin many a time, and went out again as often; and it was only when twilight fell, and the Tsiganes were going off to the forest, that she saw one of them enter the tavern, followed her in, and, in extreme terror, crossing herself again and again, had her fortune told, heedless of the bystanders.

At Boryna's cabin in the evening, Pete told them about the Tsiganes: how they had a king, who went about covered with silver bosses, and was so perfectly obeyed that, should he even in jest command one of them to hang himself, he would do so at once!

"A king of thieves!" whispered Vitek; "a mighty man whom they set the dogs at!"

"Accursed heathens!" the old woman chimed in; and, drawing nearer, related how the Tsiganes were wont to kidnap children all about the villages.

"And, to make them black, they put them in a bath of alder-bark, so that their own mother would not know them; and then they take a brick and rub away the flesh—even to the bone—where the holy oil of baptism had been set: they simply make little fiends of them."

"And 'tis said," a girl's voice piped shrilly, "that they know charms and incantations awful even to name!"

"Aye, indeed; one would have but to breathe on you, and moustache would sprout out to a cubit's length at once!"

"We are told that a man of the parish of Slupia once set his dog on a Tsigane hag: she only waved a mirror before his eyes, and he was struck stone-blind!"

"Belike, they can change a man into anything they may choose—into a beast even!"

"Ha! whosoever drinks overmuch does truly change himself into a swine!"

"But what of that farmer in Modlitsa, who barked and ran on all fours?"

"He was possessed of an evil spirit that his Reverence cast out of him."

"Gracious Lord! can such things be? It makes my flesh creep to think of them."

"Yea, for the Wicked One prowleth on every side as a wolf round the fold!"

Terror clutched at their hearts; they gathered closer together, while Vitek, all of a flutter with dread, faltered out:

"But this place too is haunted!"

Yagustynka was down upon him at once: "Don't be a fool; don't talk nonsense."

"I do not. For I know that Something walks the stable at night, and shakes out the provender, while the horses neigh. . . . And then it passes out beyond the haystack;



for Lapa follows it, first growling, then fawning and wagging its tail: and yet there is no one to be seen. . . . It must be Kuba's ghost," he added in a low voice, looking round him with dread.

"Kuba's ghost!" echoed Yuzka, and crossed herself several times.

All were greatly impressed, and cold to the very backbone. The door opened, creaking: they all started and cried out. It was only Hanka standing on the threshold.

"Pete, where do the Tsiganes lie to-night?"

"They said in the forest, beyond Boryna's cross."

"This night ye must watch, lest they make off with aught of our things."

"So near their camp, they would scarcely steal from us."

"That's as it may be. Two years since, they lay in that very place, and went off with a sow of Soha's," said Hanka, as a warning. At bedtime, she saw to it that the byre and stable were well locked; and, returning, she looked in at her father-in-law's door.

"Yuzka! run and fetch Yagna: tell her to come at once: this night I'll not leave the door unlocked for her!"

Yuzka was soon back. No lights were in Dominikova's window, and almost all Lipka was asleep.

"The gadabout!—Well, I'll not let her in. She may spend the night out of doors," Hanka said, as she shot the bolts.

It must have been very late when, awaked by someone pushing at the door, and going to open it, she shrank back with disgust: it was Yagna, positively reeking of vodka. Her state was clear by her fumbling at the door-latch; and then she was heard stumbling over the furniture and falling like a log on to her bed.

"Had it been a fair-day, she could not have quaffed deeper!—Ah, well!"

The night was fated to bring trouble. Just before day-break, such a lamentable cry thrilled through Lipka that all those who still were sleeping donned their clothes and ran out, thinking the village was on fire.

Balcerkova and her daughters were running about, with

shrieks and screams. They had just found their horse stolen!

The whole population was instantly outside her cabin, where, in the utmost disorder of attire, and with many a sob and wailing ejaculation, they were telling how Mary had gone out before dawn to put provender in the rack . . . to find the door open and the stable empty!

"O Lord, have mercy!—Good people, help me, do something!" the old woman shrieked, clutching at her own hair, and dashing herself against the fence.

The Soltys came and sent for the Voyt, who arrived directly, but so drunk that he scarcely could stand. Utterly incapable, he only stammered unintelligibly, and ordered the people away, till at last the Soltys was obliged to remove him.

The calamity, however, was so grievous that few paid any attention to his state. Everyone was in consternation, going from the road to the stable and back again, talking one to another, hesitating as to what course to pursue, and completely dismayed. But suddenly someone shouted:

"This is the Tsiganes' work!"

"So it is: they are still in the forest, and came round to us but yesterday."

"Let us," cried Gulbasova, "go to them quickly, take the horse back, and thrash them soundly!"

When the wild uproar that arose at her words broke out, it was just sunrise. They set to pulling stakes out of fences, and running about with clenched fists to excite each other, and were ready to set out, when a fresh development took place.

Up came the Soltys' wife, all in tears, crying that their cart had been stolen from them!

The news was like a thunderbolt, and for a time they stood breathless, staring at each other with panic-stricken looks.

A horse and cart stolen together! such a thing had never been heard of.

"There's a curse upon Lipka!"



"And it is heavier every week!"

"Of old, fewer mishaps took place in a year than now in one month."

"What, oh, what will be the end of it all!" they whispered, stricken with awe.

They all immediately hastened to Balcerkova's orchard, wherein the footprints of a horse were distinctly seen on the dewy grass and the damp earth; these they followed to the Soltys' granary. It was there that the horse had been harnessed and driven round about the path near the miller's, into the road that ran towards Vola.

Half the village followed the traces in that direction; but these at last disappeared near the burnt cornstacks in Podlesie so completely that no further clue could be found.

This robbery had dispirited them all so that, in spite of the magnificent weather, few were in a state to work. They went about dejectedly, wringing their hands, condoling with Balcerkova, and each of them most anxious for the safety of her own property.

As to the old dame, she stood beside the stable-door as by a catafalque, weeping bitterly, and pouring out by fits and starts words interspersed with sighs:

"O my chestnut horse, my only one, my beloved, you the best of all my servants!—Ah me! he was but in his tenth year; I had bred him from his foaling! Even as one of my own children he was. . . . Foaled the very year my Staho was born!—What shall we do without you now, alas!"

Her complaints were all the more sincere and hearty, because just then, no men being on her farm, it was as bad to lose both her hands (she said) as lose her horse.

Of course her neighbours surrounded her with quaint attempts at consolation, and general praises of her horse's good points.

"A first-rate beast, still in its prime, and gentle as a child!"

"It kicked my boy, neighbour; but all the same, 'twas a splendid animal."

"And though it had a spavin on one leg, it was worth forty roubles any day."

"As playful as a kitten, it was! How it used to pull down the bedding from the fences!"

"We shall not look upon its like soon," they all agreed, speaking as of a dead Christian!—And whenever Balcerkova cast a glance at the manger, her sorrow welled forth afresh, and the empty stable, like a freshly-dug grave, evoked the remembrance of her loss, and the cruel injury done to her; and she was only soothed a little when she learned that the Soltys had taken Pete from Boryna's, Valek from the priest's, and, together with the miller's man, had started off after the Tsiganes.

"Ye may as well pursue the wind in the plain. 'They that steal, can conceal,'" said one.

And indeed they returned very late, announcing that every trace of them had disappeared like a stone in the water.

The Voyt showed himself at last, and, dark though it was, took the Soltys with him to report to the police; while Balcerkova and Mary went to explore the neighbouring hamlets.

They came back with no news, save that thefts had been numerous in other villages as well. So thus there now came another weighty affliction to torment the people: anxiety for the safety of their possessions. The Voyt therefore organized a "Vigilance Band"; and, for lack of young men, told out two girls nightly to make the round of the village and watch, together with all the bigger boys: besides which, the lasses were to sleep in the byres and stables.

All this was of no avail. The very first night, certain thieves went to Filipka's hut (over the water), and made off with her sow, just about to farrow!

The woman's grief could not have been more violent if her own child had been stolen. For this was all she depended on to pull through till harvest-time; and her howls of despair, as she banged her head against the walls, were frightful to hear. She went with her tale of woe to his Reverence, who gave her a rouble, kindly promising her a young pig of the farrow he himself expected at harvest-time.



They were at their wit's end how to put a stop to these robberies: everyone was filled with dreary forebodings, and went about in fear of what the coming night might bring forth.

Luckily Roch appeared in the evening with news simply too good for belief. On Thursday—the day after next—a whole troop of neighbours was coming round to help Lipka in tilling the lands!

No, they could not believe it; but when his Reverence came to confirm the news solemnly, at last their joy burst forth. The same day, when it had ceased from raining, and the steaming pools glowed scarlet in the sundown, all the roads swarmed with people. The huts seethed with the excitement of it; neighbours ran out to talk the news over with neighbours, and wonder; the robberies were quite forgotten, and the unexpected assistance rejoiced them so much that but few troubled to watch that night.

Early the next day, preparations were made to receive their visitors: the huts were cleaned, loaves baked, carts made ready, potatoes cut up for planting; and the manure that lay in heaps on the fields was scattered about over them. In every cabin, too, much trouble was taken to get food and drink for these unforeseen guests; for it was well understood that they must be treated well, and as behoved farmers. Many a fowl and goose which they had meant to sell was now put in the pot; many a loan, too, was taken from the innkeeper and the miller. In short, Lipka was, as it were, on the eve of some great festival.

No one was more enraptured and transported than Roch himself. The whole day he trudged about, hastening the preparations where needful, and so bright and chatty that, when he came round to the Borynas', Hanka, who was unwell and had taken to bed again, could not help remarking:

"Your eyes gleam as if ye were sick with a fever!"

"'Tis with joy they gleam! for I never yet felt so happy. Oh, think of it: so many peasants coming over to Lipka for two whole days to do all the most urgent work! How can I help rejoicing?"

"But I cannot make out how this aid is to be—gratis, paid only with a 'God reward you!'"

"Aye, for those three words they will come to our help, like true Poles and true Christians. Aye, this has never yet been seen, and therefore has evil flourished in the country. . . . Things will grow better still: ye shall see!—Our folk will gain understanding, and know that we should look only to ourselves; that none will assist us, unless we ourselves do so, each helping the other in time of need.—Ye shall see: the time will come!" he cried, radiant, stretching forth his arms as though to embrace the whole people and unite it in the strong bonds of love.

But when they asked him who had worked the miracle, he slipped away and wandered amongst the huts, where the girls were getting ready the morrow's dresses—almost holiday attire—in the hope that some unmarried man might be coming over.

The first rays of morning had but just shone upon the roofs, when the whole place was in readiness: chimneys sent up their smoke, girls darted from hut to hut, and little boys climbed up to the ridge-pole to look out along the roads. All was in solemn silence. The day was not sunny; sombre rather; but warm, with a touch of melancholy in the air. Birds chirruped loud in the orchards, but the people's voices were subdued and in keeping with the mild dank weather.

They waited a good while, and it was only just before Mass that the dull beat of the hoofs on the highways was heard, and a procession of carts appeared coming out of the distant bluish haze.

"Here they come, from Vola!—From Rzepki!—From Deb-itsa!—From Przylek!"

With these shouts, they ran towards the church, in front of which the first carts had stopped. Presently the whole space was thronged with horses in harness, and with men. Gaily dressed peasants leaped out of the carts, saluting the women who came crowding in on every side: while the little ones, as usual, bawled a noisy welcome to the strangers.



The service was beginning; so in they went to hear Mass first of all.

As soon as it was over, the villagers grouped themselves round about the belfry, the goodwives foremost, and the girls on either side of them, a little behind; while the *Komorniki* stood apart in a heap, unwilling to appear too bold in the presence of his Reverence, who soon appeared, gave all a hearty greeting, and, in concert with Roch, settled who should work on each farm, taking care that the wealthiest peasants should work on the best farms.

Half an hour had not elapsed before all were distributed; there only remained in front of the church a few *Komorniki* in tears, who had vainly hoped that some worker might fall to their share. And now every homestead was in motion, benches set out in front of the huts, and breakfast laid on the tables; while nips of vodka were tossed off "to their better acquaintance." The lasses served with alacrity, for most of the visitors were unmarried men, and clad almost as though they had come rather to a betrothal than to a long spell of toil.

There was no time for conversation. Nor did they linger much over breakfast; for, as they politely remarked, "they had not yet deserved hospitality."

So they speedily made for the fields, under the goodwives' guidance.

And now arose a day of high solemnity along that countryside. Waste and, as it were, palsied erewhile, it took up a new life now. Wagons rolled out of every farm-yard, ploughs moved forth on every road; all the field-paths were alive with people, hailing each other with merry cries across orchards and enclosures; horses neighed, dogs gave tongue, running wildly after the colts; a strong lusty joy of life, filling all hearts, went brimming over into the very fields! And on potato-patch and barley-plot, free space and weedy fallow, there arose a din full of gladness and excitement and racket, as in a ball-room just before the dance.

And then came silence, broken by swishing whips, and tinkling harnesses; the horses pulled amain; the ploughs,

still rusty, cut deep into the soil, turning up their first black glossy furrows. And the people, drawing a long breath, crossed themselves, cast their eyes over the fields, and stooped down with a will to labour and to toil.

It was like a huge church in which the service had just begun. With what piety did they bend over the glebe! with what profound devotion and trust in Mother Earth did they cast forth the sacred seed, that was to bring forth much fruit on the morrow!

Like a swarm of bees, they beset the odoriferous soil—a multitudinous, laborious, silent crowd: while the lark sang overhead, poised upon unseen wings, and the wind, blowing by, rocked the trees, tumbled the women's garments, stroked down the rye-blades, and then fled away with a laugh to the forest.

For many long hours they worked on at a stretch, only from time to time straightening their bent shoulders just for a breathing-spell. Even at noonday, they did not quit the scene, but sat down in the field-paths to rest awhile and eat the food brought in pots from the cabins. But no sooner had the horses done their meal than the men returned to the ploughs again without a moment's lingering. Only the falling twilight at last put an end to their labour.

And now the village shone bright, and every cabin blazed through open door or window: within they were all busy getting supper ready. Louder grew the noise and uproar: children clamoured, horses whinnied, gates swung rasping rustily, calves bleated, geese gagged, driven home from their pastures: all Lipka effervesced with commotion and uproar.

With the evening meal there came a hush. The visitors were invited to table, and offered the first places, as honoured guests: they were pressed to eat of all that was best: meat was plentiful, and vodka flowed freely.

Through the open doors and windows, the circle of heads round the tables could be seen, spoons were heard scraping the platters, and far into the roads came the savoury scent of fried bacon.



Roch passed from hut to hut, sowing the seed of good words, as a thrifty farmer, full of care for his lands—yet at the same time not less happy, perhaps happier, than anyone else in the village.

At Hanka's, too, the day of joy was felt. Though they needed no assistance, yet they had, in order to be of service, invited to supper two men from Rzepki, who had been working at Veronka's and at Golab's.

These she had chosen because the Rzepki community claimed to be of noble blood.

In Lipka, indeed, people laughed that claim to scorn; but no sooner had they come in than Hanka was aware of a subtle distinction that stamped all they did.

They were undersized, thin, wore black well-fitting capotes like townsmen; their moustaches, of the colour of hemp, stood out stiffly; their looks were dignified, their manners courteous, and they spoke after the fashion of gentlemen. Very well-behaved folk they were, praising all they saw with courteous grace, and so pleasing of speech that the women felt mightily flattered.

Hanka paid such attention and had such an eye to all their needs that, during the plentiful supper she had had prepared and laid out over a clean white cloth on the table, her folk were continually dancing attendance on them. As to Yagna, who had made a first-class toilet for the occasion, she was in the seventh heaven, her eyes simply glued on the younger of the two men.

But when Yagustynka whispered: "He has only his own ladies to think of; a barefoot lass is of no account to him!" she turned very red, and hurried out to her own room.

It was then that Roch came in to take a look at the table.

"How amazed our men will be," he said, "to learn that the Rzepki folk have come to help them!"

"If we fought you in the wood, it was no private concern of ours: therefore do we bear no grudge," the elder of the two replied.

"Whenever two men come to blows, a third is sure to gain thereby!"

"Roch, ye say true. And if these twain make friends, may not that third have to smart for it?"

"He may. Sir, you speak most wisely."

"What Lipka must bear to-day, may be Rzepki's burden to-morrow."

"Every village must be a prey to the foe, my good sir, if they wrangle amongst themselves, instead of uniting. Wise friendly neighbours are as sure a defence as walls and palings: no swine can pass to root in their fields."

"We, Roch, know that; but our young men do not as yet, and there's the pity of it."

"Ah, but the time is coming, honoured sir: they become wiser!"

And thereupon they went out into the porch, where Pete was playing on his fiddle for the girls who had gathered to hear him.

The night was quiet, with but little wind; white mists were hovering over the lands, the lapwing piped in the morass, and the clattering of the mill-wheels went on as ever. But Lipka was noisy for a long while, with laughter and merry whispers, and walks and talks by the mill-pond, men and girls together; while their elders, sitting in front of their cabins, chatted with the older guests, and enjoyed the rest and the cool air.

Everybody was afoot the next day, almost ere the sky had begun to redden in the East.

The day was clear, and, as the night had been frosty, made the landscape gleam like silver out of the cold shadows of the chilly morning. Birds were screaming, trees murmuring, waters gurgling; and the gale that shook the thickets carried away with it rattling, bawling, roaring sounds, and the songs of the lasses as they went to work.

For some time, the fields lay frosted under the dawn, lost in sound sleep, pregnant with swelling life; but the workers soon pressed in on every side upon those slumberous strips of land, now drowned in sun-soaked dust-clouds, and silently attacked every patch. And now, from the soil, and the trees, and the grey-blue distances; from the glitter-



ing reaches of the brooks, and the red-hot disk in the skyey vault—from all these spring was pouring itself forth with such intoxicating might that one held one's breath for very joy, and a blessed feeling came and made the tears to start, the knees to bend, the bosom to heave, in the presence of that holy miracle of Life, visible in the meanest blade that tossed in the spring breeze.

Therefore did the people gaze around with long looks of awe, and cross themselves, and, having said their morning prayers, set to work in silence, so that the Mass-bell had not yet rung when everyone was at his post.

The mists soon dissolved, and all the fields shone in sunlight. As far as the eye could reach over the village lands, divided by long green strips of autumn-sown corn, they were swarming with red skirts, flashing with ploughs, broken up with harrows (pulled by farm-girls), and hoed by ranks of potato-planting women. Often, too, along the narrow stretches of dark soil there would pass a peasant, with a great piece of canvas round his loins; who, slightly bending forward, would with a reverent motion of his opening hand fling the corn down upon the expectant soil.

All toiled zealously, scarcely noticing his Reverence, who appeared directly after Mass beside his farm-servant, ploughing close to the road; and their amazement was extreme when they saw him coming round to the corn-plots, hailing his parishioners jovially, offering them snuff, and, after some friendly words, patting the children's heads, joking with the younger women, seizing a bough to drive a flight of sparrows from the barley, blessing the first handful of seed to be sown, or even sowing a handful himself: all the while urging the work on so energetically that no overseer could have done better!

He visited them again, too, immediately after dinner; for though (as he told the women) it was St. Mark's day, the procession was not to take place till the octave, on the 3rd of May.

"We must not interrupt our work, for our helpers will no longer be here to-morrow."

He stayed on in the open till the very end, with cassock tucked up, and leaning on a stick, as he was a corpulent man; yet going about unweariedly, and only now and then sitting down to wipe the perspiration from his bald forehead.

They were most pleased to see him; and somehow the work seemed to go on faster and easier under his eye: moreover, the peasants felt vastly pleased at his Reverence's kindness in coming to superintend the work.

The red sun was rolling forestwards, and they were already finishing the more urgent work in haste, because they were anxious to be home ere dusk.

Several of them would not even stay to sup, but departed after swallowing a mouthful of food; others quickly stowed away the contents of the dishes offered them; for their horses were harnessed and waited in front of the cabins.

The priest went round again with Roch, thanking every man, and especially those of Rzepki, for their friendly assistance.

"What you give to the needy you give to Jesus Himself. Aye, and though ye are not liberal in your offerings for Masses, and forget the wants of the church, and though I have for a whole year pointed out to you that your pastor's roof lets in the rain—still I shall always remember you in prayers for your generosity towards Lipka." So he spoke, moved even to tears, and kissing each man's head as it bent before him.

They were then close to the blacksmith's, and on their way to the farther end of the village, when they were stopped by a crowd of weeping *Komorniki*, headed by Kozlova.

"Excuse us, your Reverence; we have come to ask whether these people are not going to help us too," she said boldly, in a loud tone of voice.

"We were waiting for our turn to come."

The others chimed in here: "Are we poor wretches to remain without any help?"

The priest, much embarrassed, grew exceedingly red in the face.



"What am I to do?" he said; "there were not enough workers for all. . . . As it is, they have kindly given us their toil for two whole days . . . and . . . and . . ." he stammered, looking from one to another.

"Yes," sobbed Filipka, "they have helped—but whom? Why, the landowners . . . the wealthy men only!"

"For us, pestilent creatures, no one has cared or thought at all!"

"No, not even for a furrow or two, driven through our potato-plots!" they muttered gloomily.

"But, good women, they are leaving now . . . and . . . yes, something will be done for you. Truly, I know it is hard . . . your husbands are in jail with the others. . . . Yes, I assure you, something shall be done!"

"And for that something," cried Gulbasova, "how long are we to wait? If we cannot plant our potato-patches, we may as well seek a rope at once!"

"But something shall be done, I tell you! Ye shall have my horses—aye, even for one whole day . . . but pray do not tire the poor beasts. . . . And I will be the miller too: and the Borynas may also give help perhaps. . . ."

"Perhaps!" roared Kozlova. "While the grass grows, the steed starves!—Come away, women!—Everything is for the farm-owners, and we, miserable starvelings, may eat stones and drink our tears!—This shepherd only cares for the sheep he can shear: we have no wool for him!"—But here the priest stopped his ears and took to flight.

They stood huddled together, sore and angry. Roch did all he could to pacify them, promising sincerely he would procure assistance, and succeeded in getting them away from the road, along which the friendly helpers were now going home in their noisy carts, with cries of gratitude from every threshold.

"May our Lord be your reward!"

"Health and happiness!"

"We'll be quits some day!"

"Remember and see us every Sunday: we're kinsfolk now!"

"Greet your parents! Bring your wives when you come!"

"Should you ever need aught, count on us!"

"God prosper you, dear ones!"

So they cried, caps and hands waving.

The lasses and all the children escorted them out of the village.

It was evening now, and the after-glow was still red upon the waters here and there; silence came down with the mists of night, but the frogs fell a-croaking in concert.

They went with them as far as the cross-ways, and parted from them with shouts and laughter, one of the girls striking up a song as they drove off.

"Yasio, will you wed me now?  
Father's wagon comes, I trow,  
Rattling on the way—  
Da dana!  
Rattling on the way!"

To which the lads answered, turning round in the carts:

"Now, 'tis cold and we should freeze;  
Whom can frosty kisses please?  
Let us wed in May!  
Da dana!  
Let us wed in May!"

And the fresh young voices echoed over the dewy grass and rolled on and afar.



## CHAPTER VII

“OUR boys are returning!”

The news came like a flash of lightning, and spread through Lipka like wildfire.

Were they, truly? And if so, when?

No one knew.

Only one thing was sure: the constable of the commune had been at the Voyt's with a certain paper, and told it to Klembova, who was just driving her geese to the mill-pond. She had instantly rushed round to her neighbours; the Balcerék girls had cried the news out to the nearest huts: and in the space of an "Ave Maria," the whole place was quivering with glad emotion, and all the cabins were in tumult.

It was an early May morning, rather dull and rainy, drizzling and dripping over the blossoming fruit-trees.

"The men are coming back!"—All the cabins rang with a merry peal of joy; a flame was in every heart, and a cry in every throat.

The excitement grew more and more: doors banging, children rushing about, women dressing in front of their huts, and looking wistfully out into the rain through the blossoming trees which concealed the distant roads.

"All are coming back—farmers, servants, young men: every one of them!—They are here!—Out of the woods!—Upon the poplar road!" they cried, one voice after another; and those more ardent sallied forth, almost beside themselves.

Clogs clattered and splashed through the mud, and they hurried on, past the church to the poplar road. But on all the length of that long wet highway, there was nothing to

be seen but deep ruts and pools of dirty water: not a single living being along the whole interminable arcade of rain-beaten poplars.

Bitterly disappointed, they hastened away to the opposite end of the village, for the men might also be coming in that direction.

That other road was empty too. Across its width, full of hollows, the rain beat, forming a mobile veil; its ditches brimmed with clayey water that overflowed the adjacent furrows and swept down quantities of drifting foam; and on the blossomy brambles which bordered the green fields, the flowers seemed shrinking in the chilly air.

They went on a little, till someone, coming out of the charred ruins of Podlesie, appeared on the road and drew nigh them.

He was a blind old *Dziad*, known to all of them. The dog he held back by a string barked furiously, straining to break loose and attack them. The man listened awhile, his staff in readiness; but soon, hearing their voices, he hushed the dog, greeted them in God's name, and said gaily:

"Ye are Lipka folk, are ye not? And a good many of you, I think."

The girls came thronging round him, talking all at once.

"A flock of screeching magpies has beset me, i' faith!" he grumbled, but listened the more attentively as they pressed closer.

So they all returned together to the village, the *Dziad* in their midst, swinging along on his crutches, his distorted legs dangling below, and his large sightless face stretched forward above: a somewhat tubby man, with red puffed cheeks, eyes sheathed with a white film, grey bushy brows, and a huge red nose.

He listened patiently till he had learned what they were out for, and then said:

"It was these very tidings I was hastening hither to bring you! A certain unbaptized one had told me in secret that your men were coming back to-day; and I hoped to be



first here with the good news. Besides, Lipka is a fine village to visit. Now, who are these around me?"

They told him their several names.

"Why, the very flower of Lipka, I declare!—Oho! ye were out after your young men . . . and found a blind old beggar instead, did you?"

"Nay!" they roared; "each of us was after her father!"

"Dear, dear! Blind I am, but not deaf!"

"We were told they were coming, and went forth to meet them."

"Far too early. If the goodmen are home by noon, it will be well; the young fellows may not be here even at night-fall."

"If set free together, they surely will come home likewise."

"Oh, but the town and its pleasures! Are the girls there few? What in the world should draw them hither? Ha, ha?" he said teasingly.

"Let them enjoy themselves! We shall not fret, not we!"

"Right," said Nastka, sulkily. "There are plenty of wet-nurses in town, and of Jews' servants too: for those that like such, 'tis just what they want."

"If they prefer the slums and dens of towns, they are not the men for us!"

"Have you been long away from Lipka, Father?" one of them asked.

"Very long: in fact, since last autumn. I spent the winter with kindly people, and lived at the Manor all the time."

"What! at Vola? with our Squire?"

"With the same. I am always welcome there, both to the masters and to the masters' dogs: all know me, and treat me well. I had a warm corner, close to a stove; and all the time I plaited straw-bands and praised the Lord. . . . I have put on flesh, and so has my dog.—Ho, ho! the Squire is a wise man. He's a friend to the *Dziads*, for well he knows they will share all they have with him. Ha! ha!" He shook with laughter, and blinked his blind eyelids as he added:

"But when God sent the springtime back again to us, it

irked me to dwell in their chambers. . . . I longed for the peasants' huts and the wide world.—Ah, this drizzling rain! it is a shower of gold, warm, abundant, fertilizing; making the young grass smell sweet throughout the land.—But whither are ye running, girls?"

He heard their footsteps as they scampered off, leaving him close to the mill, and called them once more, but to no purpose. They had seen women going by to the Voyt's, and flown that way.

About half the village was there by this time, eager for some positive news.

The Voyt, who it seemed had just risen, was sitting in shirt and nether garments on his door-step, calling to his wife for his boots, and wrapping his feet in foot-clouts, used instead of socks.

All rushed at him, breathless, greedy, and impatient to the last degree.

He let them talk, put on his grease-anointed boots, washed his face in the passage, and then, while he combed his thick fell of hair at the open window, answered them flippantly:

"Want the boys so much, do ye?—Have no fear: they will be home to-day most certainly.—Mother, hand me the paper the constable brought in; it is behind the picture."

He turned it about, and tapped it with his fingers, saying:

"Here it is, as plain as noonday.—'The Christian inhabitants of Lipka, commune of Tymov, county of . . .—Here, read it yourselves! Your Voyt tells you they are returning, and return they will.'"

The paper he flung them passed from hand to hand, and though no one could make out a single letter, they knew it to be official, and, staring at it with joy mingled with dread, passed it from hand to hand till it got to Hanka, who took it in her apron and returned it.

"Good friend," she asked the Voyt timidly, "are they all to be freed—*all*?"

"So it is written, and so must it be!"

"My dear," said the Voyt's wife, "come in here out of the rain, you will be wet through"; but Hanka had no mind



to stay, and, throwing her apron over her head, was the first to withdraw.

She walked slowly, however, being rent with conflicting joy and terror.

"Antek—Antek will be here!" she said to herself, and a strange faintness came over her, and she was fain to hold to a fence not to fall. She struggled for breath a long while, and felt weak even to swooning.—"Antek is coming—coming back!" and she would have cried aloud with delight, but for a sense of dread, of disquietude, of blind uncanny fear that surged up within her heart!

Slowly she plodded on, holding to the fences. The whole road was full of women, flushed with exhilaration, and uttering roars of laughter, and screams and exultant shouts. Some, heedless of the drizzle, had gathered to talk outside the huts; some stood by the pond: all were greatly excited.

Yagustynka met her.

"So, ye know at last?—Well, this is good news. We have been waiting for it so long that, now it has come, I feel stunned.—Have you seen the Voyt?"

"Aye; he says it is true; has even shown us the paper."

"Then—then all must be right!—Glory to Thee, O Lord! the poor men will come back . . . our farmers will return to us!" she said fervently, clasping her hands.

From the dim eyes there dropped tear after tear: which made Hanka wonder not a little.

"Why, I expected ye would be angry about this, as about everything else: and behold, ye are weeping. Oh, wonderful!"

"What would ye? Can anyone be wroth at such a time? True, now and again, out of sheer bitterness, I let my tongue wag; but there is something else at the bottom of my heart that makes me, willy-nilly, rejoice or grieve with other folk. Nay, one cannot live quite separated from all. . . ."

Now they were nearing the smithy, where hammers were clinking in cadence, flames of a peach-red hue flying out of the forge, and the blacksmith, trundling a red-hot tire, made it shrink in cooling upon a wheel that lay close to the

wall. At the sight of Hanka, the smith stopped, drew himself up, and fixed his eyes on her face.

"Well, has Lipka cause for rejoicing at last? I hear that *some* are returning."

"Some? nay, but all!" Yagustynka corrected him. "Did not the Voyt read it so?"

"All? but he never meant felons. No: crimes must be punished."

Hanka's brain whirled at those cruel words. She crawled on, struck to the heart, but said as she passed:

"May your wicked tongue cleave to the roof of your mouth!"

His laugh tore her like the fangs of a wolf, and she hurried forward to escape from the sound.

She only felt quite recovered at the door of her cabin.

"'Tis wet to-day," said Yagustynka; "we shall find the ground difficult to plough."

She made light of it.

"'Wet morning weather, and an old dame's dance, last not long'!"

"Meanwhile we must be planting our seed-potatoes with the hoe."

"I am expecting the women.—These tidings have delayed them, but they will come. sent round to them last night, and they all promised they *would be ready*."

In the cabin the hearth blazed; it was warmer and brighter than out of doors. Yuzka was peeling potatoes, and the baby screaming for food: Hanka, kneeling down by the cradle, gave it suck.

"Now, Yuzka, Pete has to cart the dung from Florka's shed to the field we have, by Paches' rye-plots. He can get several cartloads there before the rain is over."

"Ye are no friend of the slothful here!"

"Nor am I a sluggard myself!" she returned, as she covered her breast.

"Oh, I had quite forgotten. It is a half-holiday: St. Mark's procession, that was postponed till the octave!"

"Why, the processions are to be only on Rogation Days!"



"He announced one for to-day: we shall go as far as the roadside 'figures,' and bless the village boundaries without any Rogation procession."

"Ha!" cried Yuzka to Vitek, who entered just then; "and you boys will be thrashed at the boundaries to make you remember them."<sup>1</sup>

"Here are the women; run ye, and see to them. I stay inside, to make order and get breakfast ready, while Yuzka and Vitek take the potatoes to the fields."

So Hanka gave her orders, looking out at the *Komorniki* who in their smocks and aprons, with baskets and hoes in hand, ranged themselves along the cabin-wall, beating their clogs against it to clean them.

Presently they were at work in the fields, two and two, two couples to each strip, each turned towards her companion, digging hollows in the ground, throwing in a potato, and covering it with earth again; and so on across the patch.

Old Yagustynka acted as overseer to prevent idling.

The work went slowly, all the same. Their hands were stiff with cold, their clogs full of water from the soaked ground; and though the drizzle was not cold, still it was continuous and drenched them.

Soon, however, the weather changed; the sky became dappled and mottled with blue; swallows, pioneers of sunshine, began to dart about; and the crows, leaving the house-tops, came flapping low over the land.

The women, bent down and stooping, delved on, looking for all the world like heaps of sodden tatters. They did their work leisurely, with long rests, and talking among themselves. After a time, Yagustynka, who was sowing haricot beans between the rows of potatoes, called out, as she gazed around:

"To-day there are but few goodwives to be seen out of doors!"

<sup>1</sup> In England and Scotland there was once a similar custom, now become a mere "perambulation." See "Chambers' Encyclopædia," art. "Beating the Bounds."—*Translator's Note.*

"Ah, no! their men are coming; 'tis not work they are thinking of!"

"No, indeed: only cooking fat dishes and warming feather-beds!"

"Oh, ye laugh!" said Kozlova; "yet ye are yourselves all of a twitter because of them!"

"Lipka, without the boys, is no place to live in: that's sure.—Old as I am, I tell you plainly—rascals and betrayers and bullies though they are—let but the ugliest lout amongst them all show himself, the world at once grows merrier and lighter to bear. And whoso says No to this, is a liar!"

"Yes," one of them sighed, "we women have been pining for our men, as the kite is pining for a rainy day!"

"Ah, more than one will pay dear for her pining; and the lasses most of all!"

"Before next spring, the priest will have no end of christenings!"

"Old woman, ye are talking nonsense. What did our Lord create women for? Is it a sin to bear a child?" Thus spoke the wife of Gregory the Wrymouth, who always contradicted.

"Ever the same, you! What? standing up for bastards!"

"Surely, and till my dying day I'll tell anyone this to his face: bastards or no bastards, the little ones are of our own blood, and have as much right to live as any. And the Lord Jesus will judge them all justly and only according to the good or the evil they do!"

They shouted her down, and jeered at her; but she only smote her hands together, and nodded her head.

"God speed your work!" Hanka cried to them from the stile. "How goes it?"

"Thanks: well, but somewhat damp."

"Are the potatoes sufficient?" She seated herself on the cross-bar of the stile.

"Quite; but cut into too few parts, I think."

"Nay, they are halved; and at the miller's, all the smaller



potatoes are planted whole. Roch tells me that this gives twice as good crops."

"That must be a German fashion," Gulbasova cried peevishly. "Ever since Lipka has been Lipka, we have always made as many bits as there were eyes."

"My good woman, folk are not more stupid now than they were of old."

"No, indeed! the egg would fain teach the hens, and rule the poultry-yard."

"Ye say true. But 'tis also a truth that years do not bring wisdom to some," Hanka said, as she left the stile.

Kozlova looked askance after her, and growled:

"Cocksure, as if she were really mistress at Boryna's!"

"Say no word against her!" cried Yagustynka. "She's no everyday woman, but a heart of pure gold. I do not know anyone better and brighter than her. I am with Hanka night and day; I have eyes to see, and am no fool. Oh, what that woman has had to endure!"

"Aye, and she will have to endure still more. . . . Is not Yagna in the same cabin with her? Trouble and distress will begin once more, when Antek comes back."

"I heard," Filipka bleated, "of Yagna having taken up with the Voyt: is that true?" But they laughed at her asking what the very sparrows twittered among themselves.

"Let not your tongues wag!" said Yagustynka reprovingly; "the wind may hear your words and carry them where it should not."

They set again to work, with hoes flashing, and at times clinking on a stone; but they talked on as they worked, sparing no one in the village.

As she walked away to take a look at the farm-yard, Hanka stooped, passing under the cherry-trees; for the wet boughs, laden with buds and white blossoms and sprouting leaves, were catching at her head and sprinkling it with dew.

She had scarce been out at all since Easter, having suffered a relapse after her "churching." To-day's tidings had brought her out of bed, and set her on her legs; and though

she still felt very shaky, she peered everywhere, and with growing vexation.

The cows had been ill cared for, and their flanks were clotted with dung; the sucking-pigs were in poor condition; even the geese seemed unnaturally silent, as if they had been badly fed.

"Why," she cried out angrily to Pete, who was driving off to cart the manure, "why have you not rubbed down the horse?" But he only went past, muttering something between his teeth.

A fresh motive for exasperation. In the granary, Yagna's pig was devouring the seed-potatoes heaped on the threshing-floor, while the fowls were pecking at a quantity of inferior corn that ought long since to have been taken up to the loft. For this she rated Yuzka soundly, and pulled Vitek's curly hair till the boy wriggled himself loose and made off, while Yuzka slunk away, weeping and querulous.

"I am always at work, yet ye scold me continually: Yagna never does aught, and you let her be!"

"Now, now, be still, silly one! You see but too well all that goes on here!"

"But how am I to do everything? How can I?"

"Be still, I say.—Now carry them the potatoes, or they will have to stop work."

It was no use scolding, she saw. "True, the girl cannot suffice for all; and as to the hirelings—mercy on us! even ere noon, they are looking forward to sunset! As well engage a wolf to tend sheep, as think to get profit out of a hireling. They have no conscience!"

Revolving these bitter thoughts in her mind, she discharged her fury on the pig, that ran off squealing, with Lapa savagely hanging on to its ear.

Looking into the stable, she saw, with yet greater annoyance, that the mare was biting at the empty manger, and the colt, in a most filthy state, eating straw out of its litter.

"To see this would have broken Kuba's heart!" she said, putting hay in the racks for both, and patting their soft warm nostrils.



But here she broke down. A sense of depression took hold of her, and she felt she must cry; so, sitting down by Pete's truckle-bed, she gave way, and wept aloud. . . . She knew not why.

All her energy had collapsed, her heart felt heavy as a stone. Her fate was too much for her, and not to be struggled against. Completely alone in the world and forsaken, her life was as a tree growing in a windy place, exposed to every evil blast! No one even to complain to; and no end of her ill fortune in sight: only eternal mortification and sorrow; only endless trouble, and looking forward to worse things still!

The colt licked her face; and letting her head drop upon its neck, she burst out crying afresh.

Successful farming—respect paid her by all—what did it signify, if she had not one instant of internal happiness?

She went back to the hut. The baby was once more screaming for her breast. Having satisfied it, she looked out vacantly through the window, dingy with a sweat of trickling drops.

But the baby still whimpered and wailed uneasily.

"Hush you, little one!—Father's coming, my boy, and will bring you a toy, and you'll ride on his knee, because he's set free, and how happy we'll be!" She walked to and fro in the room, singing and rocking him in her arms.

"Perhaps he is really coming!" she repeated to herself, and stopped on a sudden.

She flushed, straightened her stooping shoulders, and thought to go to the store-room and cut him a piece of ham, and then to the tavern for vodka. . . . But the smith's words echoed within her bleeding heart, and swooped down, tearing it as with the sharp talons of a hawk. She stopped dead, looking round her as for help: unable to tell what to do, what to think even!

"O Lord! what if he should never come back?" she moaned, raising her hands to her head.

As the children were noisy and quarrelsome, she put them

out and prepared breakfast, about which Yuzka, popping her head in more than once, had been greedily expectant.

Tears and grief had to be thrust back again; the yoke of daily labour, pressing heavily on her soul, reminded her that her work could not be put off.

She did her best, though her legs shook under her; only from time to time she dropped a tear, and looked wistfully out into a dimly seen world.

"Is that Yagna going to help in potato-planting?" Yuzka cried through the window.

Hanka left the pot of beet-root soup on the hob, and hurried over to the other side of the hut.

The old man lay on his side, seemingly contemplating Yagna, who was combing her long bright hair before a looking-glass, set upon a locker.

"Ye are not at work; is it, then, a saint's day?"

"I am not going unkempt."

"Since dawn ye could ten times over have done your hair."

"I could, but have not."

"Yagna, I will not be trifled with: beware!"

"Of what?" she snarled back fiercely. "Of being turned out, dismissed from service, eh? I am not here at your good pleasure, nor in your house!"

"And in whose then, pray?"

"In my own, and I'd have you remember it!"

"Should Father die, we'd soon see what right ye have here!"

"But while he lives, I can show you the door."

"What? What did you say?"

"Ye are beyond bearing! I never say one idle word to you, and ye always quarrelling with me."

"Thank God, you, that I do no worse!" she said, slouching forward with a threatening mien.

"Try your utmost! I am alone, with none to help me; but we'd see who would have the upper hand."

She threw her hair back: their eyes, full of rage, struck



at each other like knives. And Hanka utterly lost control of herself, and shook her fists and stormed with all her might.

"What! Do you threaten me? . . . Set to, then, O innocent thing, O most injured one!—Aye, aye, all the parish knows of your doings.—More than once they have seen you in the tavern with the Voyt!—And when the other night I opened the door to you, home from your dirty pleasures, you were drunk—drunk as a pig!—Of a truth, who lives noisily will be whispered about.—Ah! but your power is ending, and neither Voyt nor smith will protect you then—you!—you!"

She spat the words at her with a shriek.

"What I do, I do: let folk leave me alone . . . or beware!" Yagna vociferated, suddenly throwing back her beautiful flaxen hair over her shoulders.

Exasperated to the utmost, and burning for a fight, she waved her hands nervously about her hips, with a glare of hatred that made Hanka quail; without another word she left the room, slamming the door.

The brawl had overtaxed her strength. She had to sit down by the window with the child, and let Yuzka serve out the breakfast to the workers.

It was only when they had gone that she felt a little stronger, and thought to put her work off, and go to see her father, who had been ailing for some days past. But this also was too much for her, and half-way there she had to return.

After some time, however, a little strength came back to her, and she was able to do some manual work mechanically, while her thoughts were with Antek and far away.

As the weather was improving, they expected the sun to come out about noon; for the swallows now flew high in air, and flocks of gold-fringed clouds were sailing by; and in the orchards, snowy with blossoms, the birds were singing loud.

Lipka began to hum like a hive; its chimneys bore each a plume of smoke: savoury dishes were preparing within

doors. Gaiety spread from hut to hut with the babble of women; the girls adorned themselves with ribbons plaited in their tresses. Some hurried away to get vodka; for the Jew, much pleased that the peasants were to come back, was willing now to give anything on trust to whoever asked him. And from time to time, someone went up on the roof with a ladder to inspect all the roads that led from the town.

Few went afield, so busy were they with preparations. They even forgot to drive the geese out, letting them gaggle and scream in the yards; and the children, left to their own devices, went about playing very naughty pranks. The bigger boys, armed with poles, climbed the poplars, and knocked down the crows' nests; while the parent birds, looking like great smuts in the sky, wheeled about, croaking distressfully. The other youngsters found a mischievous pleasure in chasing the priest's blind old horse, which had been harnessed to a water-tub on runners, and which they tried to drive into the pond. It managed to resist its tormentors for a while, but at last, taking fright at the smell of fire in its nostrils, bolted into Boryna's enclosure, knocking down the gate and getting entangled in the bars: of which they took advantage to come to close quarters and beat it.

It might have broken a leg in its plunges to escape; but luckily Yagna came up, drove the urchins away and extricated the poor animal; then, seeing they were still lying in wait for it, she led it back to the priest's.

This took her down a lane between his garden and the Klembas', just as the organist's britzka came up. Yanek was bidding his family good-bye on the door-step, and his mother had taken her seat already.

"I am bringing back the priest's horse," she said demurely; "a lot of urchins were ill-treating it."

"Father, call Valek to take it," cried the organist's wife; then, as Valek appeared, "You lout you! to let that horse go alone! It might have broken its leg!" she added.

Yanek, seeing Yagna, glanced at his parents, and held out his hand to her.



"Yagna! God be with you!"

"Going back to school?"

His mother answered with pride: "I am taking him to begin studying for a priest."

"A priest!"

She raised her eyes and looked at him in admiration. He sat down on the foremost seat, but with his back to the horses.

"By this means, I shall see Lipka awhile longer!" he exclaimed, casting a fond glance on the lichen-covered roof of his house, and on the orchards around, all bathed in dew and overladen with blossoms.

The horses trotted off.

Yagna went after the britzka, Yanek once more bidding farewell to his sisters in tears in front of the house, but gazing only on those moist azure eyes, wonderful as the sky on a May day, which looked into his; on that fair head, crowned with braided locks that went three times round and ended in curves about her ears; and on that face, so white, so dainty, so . . . just like a wild rose!

She walked along, fascinated by the look in his bright eyes. Her lips were quivering so, that she could not close her mouth. And how her heart was beating! and how humbly she followed him with her eyes, almost swooning for the marvellous sweetness that flooded her! A strange drowsy feeling came over her, and a soporific fragrance seemed to be blunting her senses. . . .

It was only after the britzka had turned off to the poplar road, and their eyes could no longer meet, that she awoke with a shock to the dreary emptiness of all around her, and ceased to follow him. Yanek had waved a last farewell with his cap, and they had disappeared in the shades of the poplars.

She rubbed her eyes, waking as it were from a dream.

"Lord, Lord!" she ejaculated; "such eyes might draw one down to hell!

"An organist's son! . . . And looks like a young Squire!

... A priest, a priest! ... Perchance he will be sent to Lipka!"

Again she looked round; but the britzka, though not yet unheard, was no longer in sight.

"Such a mere stripling! Almost a boy! ... And yet, when he looks at me, I feel it like an embrace, and grow dizzy."

She shivered slightly, licked her scarlet lips, and stretched herself stiff, with voluptuous zest.

Suddenly she shuddered. Her head and feet were bare: she noted it only now. And she was almost undressed—only in her smock, with a tattered shawl on her shoulders!

She blushed for shame, and started for home by the most unfrequented paths.

"Know ye that the lads are coming?" girls and women and children called out to her from within their enclosures. They were all breathless with the gladness of the tidings.

"Coming or not, what is the difference?—The fools!" she murmured, annoyed at the mad joy they all felt at their husbands' return.

She looked in at her mother's. Only Andrew was at home. That day he had left his bed for the first time, and his broken leg was still in bandages. He was sitting on the door-step, weaving a basket, and whistling to the magpies that hopped about.

"Yagna, do you know? Our folk are coming home!"

"All day long naught else have I heard!"

"And Nastka is simply crazy over Simon's return!"

"Why?" Her eyes flashed sternly; they had her mother's steely glance.

"Oh, for no reason! ... My leg is hurting me again," he faltered, frightened to have betrayed a secret. "Be quiet, plaguy ones!" he vociferated, throwing a stick at a number of cackling hens.

Then he pretended to rub his leg, and looked with anxiety into her strangely louring face.

"Where is Mother?"



"Gone to the priest's.—Yagna! About Nastka . . . I . . . I said . . . what I should not . . ."

"You ass! To think none knows of that!—They'll marry, and there's the end of it."

"But—will Mother let them? Nastka has but one acre."

"If he asks, she will refuse. But he is old enough to know what to do, and how to do it."

"He is, Yagna. And if he fall out with Mother and be disobedient and marry in despite of her, then he will take his share of the land, and settle down on it."

"Talk ye and gabble as much as you like; but take heed lest Mother hear you."

She felt out of temper. What! that Nastka! she too, to have a sweetheart and rejoice with the others! Each one was returning to his own darling to-day: she raged at the thought.

"Yes, yes, they all are coming back!"

But then a sudden thrill of excitement filled her mind!—Leaving Andrew, who remained in great awe of her, she went straight back to her cabin, to smarten herself up like the others for the home-coming, and like them, too, to await the freed prisoners with feverish anxiety.

She made her toilet with great care, singing the while for joy and longing, and running out at times to look down the road towards which they all were turned.

"And whom are your eyes seeking?" was the unexpected question put to her by someone.

Her arms dropped to her sides, as a bird's broken wings, and a cruel agitation fluttered her heart.

Truly, whom had her eyes to seek? No one was hastening back to her.—"Only Antek, peradventure!" she murmured low, and heaved a sigh, while remembrances rose up in her mind, as of a wonderful dream, but dreamt, ah! so long ago!

"Yet the smith told me only yesterday that he would not be set free with the others, but lie in prison for many a year."

"But if perchance he is freed—what then?" She said the words again, as if her soul were bent on expecting him.

Nevertheless, it was not with joy or exultation: rather with a lurking sense of distaste.

"What though he comes?" she said, pettishly; "he is nothing to me now!"

At that moment old Boryna gabbled inarticulately. It was, she knew, his way of asking for food, but she turned her back on him with aversion.

"Die and have done with it!" she said with a sudden burst of spite, and went out into the porch not to see the man.

Down at the pond, there were batlets beating the linen, and washermaidens showing crimson through the green boughs. A dry breeze just moved the willows. Now and again the sun peeped from behind a veil of white cloud, making the little pools glitter, and golden ripples dance about the pond. The rain-mists had gone; and above the low grey stone walls rose the orchard-trees, with their blossoming tops, like immense nosegays, wafting fragrant odours and twittering notes through the air.

"And perhaps, too, I may see him!" she thought dreamily, turning her face towards the wind and the dews which fell dripping from the drying blooms and leaves.

"Yagna!" shouted Yuzka from the yard; "are ye going to help in the potato-field or not?"

Yes; she did not mind. She even willingly obeyed an order that took her away from herself and her incertitude: though she was still under the influence of a melancholy which brought tears to her eyes. But she set to work with such goodwill that she had presently distanced all the hired workers; and so she kept on, paying no heed to Yagustynka's taunts and gibes, nor to the eyes of the other women, that followed her every movement with the air of surly dogs ready to bite.

At times, indeed, she would straighten herself for a moment, as does a pear-tree after bending to the blast, showering its scented blossoms on every side, and (perhaps) remembering the past storms of winter.

She thought of Antek sometimes, but more often of



Yanek's glowing eyes, and of Yanek's cherry lips; and the sound of Yanek's voice echoed in her ears. And she clung with all the force of her will to those yearnings of her memories: they made such sunshine in her heart! For her nature was that of the wild hop, that for its growth and blossoming and life, must needs twine round some other plant; else, left without support, it falls and perishes.

The *Komorniki*, having flung whispers about to their hearts' content, were now taking kerchiefs and aprons off their heads, because it had grown warm; they talked louder among themselves, and stretched their limbs, yawning and longing for the noonday rest.

"Kozlova, ye are highest: pray look whether no one is coming along the poplar road."

She stood on tiptoe, but answered: "No one in sight!"

"They cannot so soon be here; the way is long: they will come at dusk."

"Besides," Yagustynka added, after her bitter fashion, "there are five taverns by the way!"

"Poor things! what do they care for taverns?"

"They have had so much to bear all this time!"

"Oh, indeed! they have had to bear warm beds and plenty to eat!"

"Of fare no better than nettles and chaff!"

"Also, freedom with a potato is better than the very best jail!" Gregory's wife said.

"A strange thing," Yagustynka mused, "is that same freedom, that we relish so: freedom to starve without paying a fine, nor being taken by the gendarmes."

"Very true, my dear; but captivity is captivity all the same."

"And a dish of pease and bacon is not a broth made of aspen pegs!" Yagustynka replied, mimicking her voice so that they all burst out laughing.

She followed up her success by abusing the miller, who "lent rotten flour to borrowers and gave short weight when paid in cash"; and then, in concert with Kozlova, set to

running down everybody in Lipka, his Reverence not excepted.

Gregory's wife tried to stand up for some: which made Kozlova cry:

"Ye would fain defend even church-robbers!"

"For we all have much need of being defended," she answered gently.

"Especially Gregory, when ye lift your hand-mangle against him!"

"Right and wrong have naught to do with you, you wife of Bartek Kozioł!" she returned in a hard voice, drawing herself up to her full height.

All were fluttered, and expected the two would come to blows at once; but they went no further than a defiant glare. And then Vitek came to ask them to dinner, and to take their baskets, the afternoon being a half-holiday.

At dinner, which Hanka served out to them outside the cabin, they talked but little. The sun was shining bright, and everything looked beautiful, with snowy blossoms scattered all about.

The day continued fine, and the breeze moved the tree-tops as gently as the hand of a mother caressing her little one's cheeks.

No more field-work, then, was done that day. Even the cattle were driven home: only a few of the poorest villagers led the hungry cow (their food-giver) by a rope to graze along the field-paths, or about the ditches.

When the sun had begun to throw somewhat longer shadows, the people gathered in front of the church, conversing in tones as low as the chirping of the birds within the lofty maples and lime-trees that spread their branches, scarce covered as yet with leaves, above the church-roof.

As usual when it has rained in the morning, the sun was hot. The women, in holiday garments, stood together in groups, some of them looking eagerly over the wall towards the poplar road; and the blind *Dziad* sat with his dog at the lich-gate, droning hymns in a singsong whine, listening



attentively to every sound he heard, and holding out a platter to the passers-by.

In a little, his Reverence came out, clad in surplice and stole, but with uncovered head, his bald crown glistening in the sun.

Pete carried the cross, for the way was too far for Ambrose; the Voyt, the Soltys, and some of the strongest girls bore the banners, which waved and flapped and gleamed resplendent with many a hue. Michael, the organist's pupil, swung the holy-water stoup and brandished the sprinkler; Ambrose distributed the tapers; and the organist, book in hand, took his place by the side of his Reverence. So they started off in silence, through the blossom-sprinkled village; and as they went along the pond, its still waters reflected the whole pageant.

On the way, many more women and children joined them; and finally the miller and the smith pressed in by the priest's side. Last of all, lagging far behind, came Agata shaken with her churchyard cough, and the blind old *Dziad*, swinging along on his crutches; but the latter turned off at the bridge, and made for the tavern.

They lit the tapers only on passing the mill: the priest donned his biretta, made the sign of the cross, and intoned Psalm XCI: "He that dwelleth . . ."

The whole procession took it up with fervour, and on they went by the riverside, through the meadows where there was still many a pool, and they had more than once to go ankle-deep in mud. Shading the tapers with their hands, they wound on by the narrow footpath, the women's skirts forming a long red line like the beads of a rosary.

Shimmering in the sunbeams, the river purled and meandered through the verdurous meadows, spangled with white and yellow flowers.

Overhead the banners waved, as birds flapping wings of red and gold. In front, the cross lumbered along, and through the still transparent air rose the slow voices of the singers.

On the river-banks, thickly studded with marsh-marigolds,

the waters splashed on as a gentle echo of the psalms, rolling towards the distant sky-line on which every eye was fixed, and towards the hamlets seen on the far-off heights; now scarcely visible through the bluish haze, amid the whitely blooming orchards in which they nestled.

Walking with his assistants immediately behind the cross, the priest sang with the others.

"What a multitude of wild ducks!" he whispered, glancing to his right.

"They are widgeons," the miller answered, looking down to the riverside, overgrown with last year's withered reeds and alders, out of which flocks of wild ducks flew out at times on heavy wings.

"There are also more storks than last year."

"They find plenty to eat in my meadows: so they come here from all parts."

"Ah! mine is gone: it left me about Eastertide."

"Gone off, belike, with a flock of others flying by."

"What have you there, on those muddy stretches?"

"I have had an acre of land sown with maize: the soil is rather damp, but they say the summer will be dry; so I may make something by it."

"May it not be like my last year's maize! the crop was not worth gathering."

"Except by the partridges. It fed many a covey," said the miller, with a chuckle.

"Aye, the partridges were for the Squire's table, and my poor beasts had nothing to eat."

"If mine succeeds, I'll send your Reverence a cart-load."

"Many thanks; my last year's clover was but a poor crop, and, should we have a drought, things will go ill for me!" He sighed, and continued the psalm.

They had just come to the first landmark, a mound so overgrown with flowering blackthorns that it rose up clad in beauty, arrayed in white blossoms and sonorous with swarms of bees.

They surrounded it with a circle of flickering lights; the cross towered aloft; the banners dipped and unfurled them-



selves; the people knelt around, as before an altar whereon the hallowed majesty of spring stood revealed amid flowers and the hum of bees.

The priest then read a prayer that no hail might fall, and sprinkled holy water to the four cardinal points, over the trees, the earth, the water, and the heads of the humble worshippers.

The people then struck up another chant, and went forward.

This time, turning somewhat to the left, they crossed the meadows up a gentle slope. But the children stayed behind a little; and the sons of Gulbas, aided by Vitek, and according to the immemorial custom, here thrashed several boys so soundly that there was a great uproar, and the priest was obliged to intervene and quiet them.

Farther on, they came to a wide place of pasturage at the parish boundaries, dotted over with little thickets of juniper, growing at the border. This pasture land wound hither and thither, like a green river, with waves of grass, and so full of flowers that even the old cart-ruts abounded in daisies and dandelions. In places, too, there were large trees, so fenced about with brambles that there was no approaching them; and then came wild pear-trees, all in bloom, sung to by myriads of bees, and towering aloft, most beautiful and godlike of shape; one felt ready to fall down and kiss the ground which had brought them forth!

And then, the birch-trees! How they arched their lovely trunks, attired in silvery bark, quite over-canopied with green braids and tresses, and reminding you of a young maiden, intensely quivering with pure emotion, who goes to her first Communion!

Little by little, they trended uphill, circling Lipka from the north, and along the miller's fields, lush with rye: first the cross, then the priest, afterwards the girls and younger women, then the old folk straggling by twos and threes abreast, and, last of all, Agata, hobbling and coughing.

When they were out on the plain, the hush deepened. The wind had fallen; the banners hung limply down, and the

procession lengthened out to the extent of a furlong, the women's bright dresses set off by the surrounding greenery, and the taper-flames trembling and fluttering like golden butterflies.

And, high above, the sky was quite blue, except for a few woolly clouds, white sheep on the immensity of those azure fields, through which the huge hot sun rolled on, bathing the world in heat and splendour.

The chants now grew louder, resounding from full throats and hearts with such deafening clamour that the birds flew frightened out of the trees that stood near; and sometimes a partridge rose in alarm from under their very feet, or a leveret went bounding away.

"The autumn-sown lands are getting on well," the priest whispered.

"I have seen corn already in the ear there," said the miller.

"Whose is that field, so badly tilled? The furrows are half full of dung!"

"Some poor *Komornik's* potato-patch: it looks as if ploughed with a cow!"

"Probably his Reverence's farm-hand has ploughed it, then," the blacksmith put in with quiet malice.

His Reverence turned angrily upon him, but said no word, and set once more to singing along with the people; now and then casting his eyes over the vast expanse of fields, swelling out here and there like the breasts of a mother giving suck, and seeming to heave gently, as if she would gather together and feed all who came to her bosom.

Sunset was gilding the corn, and the trees in bloom were throwing lengthier shadows; the mill-pond shone dazzlingly in its lovely frame of orchards, snowy with fallen blossoms. The village lay beneath them as at the bottom of an enormous dish, and so compassed about with trees that the grey barns were but seldom visible. The church alone lifted its white walls up above all the huts, its golden cross gleaming bright in the sky.

"How still it is! I hope it will not rain to-night," said the priest.



"It will not; the sky has emptied itself out, and there's a cool breeze."

"In the forenoon it was raining; and now, not a trace of water!"

"In spring the water vanishes quick," the blacksmith chimed in.

Now they had come to the next mound, that formed a landmark of the commune. It was very large: they said that men lay under it who had been slain in "The War." It was topped by a small cross of shaky timber, adorned with last year's images and garlands, and draped with many a scarf. Close by stood a willow with forked and rotten trunk, that hid the fissures of old age under the new shoots that it bore. The place was drearily waste and sinister: no birds made their nest near it. Fruitful lands extended on every side; but among these the mound lifted up its barren flanks, with yellow streaks of sand, and abounding only in houseleeks that spread here and there in patches like a foul tetter, along with the dried stalks of last year's mullein and nightshade.

They recited the prayers against the plague, and, quickening their pace, turned on again to the left, beyond the poplar road, following a narrow and deeply rutted cartway.

But Agata stayed behind a little to tear off some bits of scarf from the cross. These, as she once more went after the procession, she buried one by one in the field-paths, for some superstitious purpose of hers.

The organist now began the litany, which, however, was taken up but feebly, only a few of the people responding.

Meanwhile, the priest, now much exhausted, was wiping his bald head, looking round on the neighbouring lands, and conversing with the Voyt.

"I see the pease have come out finely here."

"An early crop, no doubt, and well-prepared soil."

"I sowed some before Holy Week, and yet mine are only just peeping out!"

"Because your Reverence's land lies low and is exposed to the north."

"Why, the barley here sprouts up as regular as if sown with a drill!"

"The Modlitsa folk are good husbandmen, and till their lands like the Manor people."

"Ah, but how wretchedly our fields have been tilled, God forgive us!" the priest ejaculated mournfully.

The blacksmith laughed sneeringly. "Tilled by charity! One must not look a gift-horse in the mouth!"

"You little rascals! If you don't leave off, I'll pull your ears!" the priest cried out to some urchins who were shying stones at partridges.

The conversation ceased, for the organist began to chant, the smith accompanying him, and the women's voices rising up in a dolorous chorus; and the litany floated across the land like a bevy of birds that, tired by a long flight, sink slowly down towards the ground.

On they pushed through the green plots, and the men of Modlitsa, and even those farther away, stopped work to take off their caps or even kneel down in the fields, while the cattle raised their horned heads and lowed.

They were about a furlong away from the third mound and the poplar road, when someone gave a loud shout:

"There are peasants, coming out of the wood!"

"Our own people, perchance!"

"Our own! our own!" they cried, and there was a rush forward.

"Stay!" the priest commanded severely. "God's service first!"

They obeyed indeed, but stamped on the ground with impatience. All now crowded together behind the priest, who, though he kept them back, hurried his steps himself.

A breeze had sprung up, putting the tapers out, waving the banners, and making the rye, the brushwood, and the trees in bloom to bow before the procession as it passed. The people sang more loudly, and were almost breaking into a run, peeping the while between the roadside trees to make out the peasants' white capotes.



"They will not run away from you!" the priest said, reprovingly, for they were pressing close, treading on his heels.

Hanka, who walked in the ranks of the goodwives, cried out aloud on perceiving the white capotes. And though without hope to behold Antek with the others, the sight filled her with the most intense delight.

Yagna too, who was walking by her mother's side, felt impelled to run forward. A fever of desire had taken hold of her, and her teeth chattered so that she could not clench them. Nor were the other women less eager to meet their loved ones. More than one of the lasses and lads could not hold back any more, and, though called back, ran on by a short cut to the road, their legs twinkling as they ran.

The procession was soon at Boryna's cross, just in front of the mound which formed the boundary between the Lipka territory and the Manor lands.

And there, under the birches that overshadowed the cross—there they stood all—their goodmen—their sweethearts! On seeing the procession, they had uncovered their heads, and all the women could see the long-desired faces of their husbands and fathers and brothers and sons: emaciated and haggard, but shining with joy!

"The Ploshkas!" — "The Sikoras!" — "Matthew!" — "Klemba!"—"Poor dear ones!"—"Our best-beloved!"—"O Lord Jesus!"—"O Holy Mother!"—Invocations, cries, whispers of love filled the air: every eye blazed with gladness, every hand was stretched forth, every mouth uttered shouts of exultation. But the priest silenced them all with a word, and, advancing towards the cross, he calmly read the prayer: "From fire . . ." But he could not read fast; he was unable to help looking very frequently aside to cast compassionate eyes on those poor worn faces.

And when he had done, he sprinkled holy water over their bowed heads, and cried with all his might:

"Praised be Jesus Christ!—O my dear people, how is it with you all?"

They answered him in chorus, pressing round him as sheep round their shepherd, some kissing his hands, some embracing his knees. He strained each of them to his heart, stroked their thin cheeks, and asked about their health with the kindest attention. At last, quite wearied out, he sat down under the cross, wiping sweat from his brow and tears of fatherly love from his eyes.

Around him, his people gave way to all the impetuosity of passionate tenderness.

Then arose a tumult of laughter and of kissing, of happy tears, childlike prattle, words of fire, ardent whispers, and cries that burst out like songs from their rejoicing hearts. Women took their husbands apart, men stood swaying about in a ring of women and children, and speech and weeping rose in blissful confusion. All this lasted many minutes, and would have lasted longer, but that the priest saw it was getting late, and gave the signal to depart.

So they went on to the last mound on the road by the forest, skirted with young junipers and pine-saplings.

The priest intoned: "O most beloved Mother! . . ." which all took up as one man with a great cry, their hearts brimming over with bliss; and the hymn, like a spring tempest, burst forth and smote on the forest with darts of fiery jubilation.

And the forest bent its head over the road, looking down on them, waving its tree-tops in the evening sun, but within its depths so hushed and calm that the very tappings of the woodpeckers were clearly heard, and the cuckoo's call, and the twittering of the field-birds.

In places, their way led them along upon the verge of the tilled lands; and the peasants, silently passing in serried ranks by the road-ditches, stooped down to cast their eyes over the green expanse; to gaze on the blossoming trees, all on fire in the sundown, and the long strips of cornland lying prostrate before them, and those fields, covered with long waves of winter-corn, that seemed rolling up to their feet with a jubilant murmur. And how their eyes gloated over



that land, their true foster-mother! Some even saluted it with doffed caps; all knelt down in spirit, mutely and fervently worshipping Her, the Hallowed, Her, the Much-desired!

After these first salutations came more noisy chat and freer rejoicings of heart. Many a one, too, would fain have run into the wood and shouted himself hoarse, or lain down to shed tears of pure happiness in the fields.

Hanka alone felt herself cut off from them all. Around her everywhere and before her, the men went about, loud in talk, and women and little ones crowded about them, enraptured and, as it were, pressing together under their wings. She alone had no one there who cared for her. All were boisterous with uncontrollable delight, and she, though in their midst, drooped and pined—as she had seen trees surrounded with lush underwood, but dying away, wherein even the crow would not build its nest, and whereon not a bird would alight! Few troubled to greet her. Of course; each was hastening to his own people.—And so many of them had been sent home! even that Koziol, after whose return they would again need to watch the store-rooms and lock the sties! The ringleaders too were back: Gregory, the Voyt's brother, and Matthew. Only Antek stayed in jail: perhaps never again to be seen by her!

Those thoughts were fast becoming unbearable: they were oppressing her so that she could hardly walk. And yet walk she did, with head erect, and apparently as brave and high-spirited as ever. When they sang, she joined in with a firm voice: when the priest offered up prayers, she was first—though with pallid lips—to repeat them after him. It was only in the intervals of silence, hearing round her whispers of ardent love, that she had to fix her eyes upon the glittering cross, and march on, careful lest her tears—those traitors making their way beneath her reddened eyelids—should let them know what she felt. She refrained even from asking after Antek, fearing to break down and show what she suffered. No—no! she had borne so much, and she could go through yet more, and suffer all patiently.

One other suffered also with her. Yagna was no better off than Hanka. She walked along, moving amongst them shyly, like some startled animal of the woods. She had at first been so transported with joy that she had run first of them all to greet the men; but no one had come forward, nor gathered her into his arms, nor kissed her! She had seen from afar Matthew, towering above the others, and her flashing eyes had glanced towards him, instinct with sudden long-forgotten desires; and she had pushed through the throng. But he had, it seemed, failed to recognize her; and before she got there, his mother had her arms about his neck, his sister Nastka and the other children were embracing and hugging him on every side; while Teresa (the soldier's wife), bathed in tears and careless who might see her, was grasping his hand!

Her fire was quenched at once, as with a stream of icy water. How intense had been her wish to feel herself one of that crowd, part and portion of the crush; to join in that thrilling tumult of salutes, and enjoy herself like the others! For indeed, like them all, her heart had glowed with enthusiasm, and been ready for every transport of tenderness: and now she found herself isolated, out of it all: just like a mangy dog, she thought!

It was very, very bitter for her, and she barely refrained from tearful complaints, as she moved on, louring as a dark cloud that may at any time pour down a torrent of rain.

More than once she had thought to slip away home, but could not: it was too hard to leave the procession! So she remained with the others, but as bewildered as Lapa seeking his master in a crowd. She felt no inclination to go either with her mother or with her brother Simon, who had purposely slipped away with Nastka among the juniper-bushes on the road.—All these things had finally made her so furious that she would have liked to stone all the lot of them, with their silly grinning faces!

She was somewhat relieved that they had now left the forest on one side.



The last mound stood by the crossways, one of which ran straight down to the mill.

The sun had set, and a chilly wind blew from the lower levels. The priest, for whom Valek was waiting with a britzka, now hastened the service. They still went on singing, but with tired voices; the men asked in whispers about the farm which had been burnt at Eastertide, and whose blackened ruins they saw quite near; and they also gazed with curiosity at the Manor lands close at hand.

There the Squire was to be seen, riding about the fields on his sorrel horse; also some men who appeared to be measuring the ground with long rods. Close to the cross, just where the roads forked, and over against the burnt cornstacks, a large yellow britzka was to be seen.

"What may this mean?" someone asked.

"They are measuring the land, but do not look like surveyors."

"Tradespeople, I dare say: they have not the air of farmers."

"Of Germans, rather."

"Aye, aye: dark-blue capotes, pipes in their mouths, and long trousers."

They stared and whispered with great curiosity, not unmixed with a vague sense of uneasiness; and they were so taken up that they did not notice the blacksmith who quietly slunk away, crawling by the ditches until he got to the Squire.

"Are they buying the Podlesie farm, by any chance?"

"I certainly heard them say at Easter that the Squire was looking out for purchasers."

"But Heaven protect us from such neighbours as the Germans!"

The procession was now over. The priest got into his britzka and drove off with the organist; while the people broke up into small parties, trudging slowly home, some by the road, some along various pathways and in Indian file, each taking the nearest way to his dwelling.

The dusk was gathering over the land and the carmine

of the sunset sky passing higher up into a pallid green. From beyond the mill white vapours came rolling up in flocculent masses. Through the stillness now descending over the country-side, the *klek-klek-klek* of the stork resounded loud and sharp.

No human voices were heard there any longer, for the procession had quite melted away in the fields.

But soon the village became filled with sounds: on every side, they were coming noisily in. Every man made the sign of the holy cross on the threshold that he had quitted so long since; many a one fell prostrate before the holy images, sobbing for very fullness of heart.

And now there were fresh greetings, and the chattering of women and the prattle of infants, and many a narrative begun, interrupted by hot kisses and bursts of laughter. The women, flushed and blowzed, set the dishes before the poor sufferers, offered them food in plenty and pressed it on them with the utmost eagerness.

And so happy were they to be back again and with their families, that this made them forget all their past injuries, and the long months of their separation, and they again and again hugged their dear ones to their bosoms, asking them questions without end.

Then, after supper, they went out to look at the farm-yard; and though it was growing dark, still they managed to go about the orchards and outhouses, patting their live stock, or stroking the heavy blossom-laden boughs, as though they were the heads of beloved children.

But it is quite impossible to describe the raptures of Lipka that evening.

With the exception, indeed—and a great one—of Boryna's cabin.

The place was well-nigh deserted. Yagustynka had gone home to her people; Yuzka and Vitek had found some other hut where there was more company and greater merriment. Hanka remained apart in the dark dwelling, nursing her wailing child, and yielding at last to her anguish with bitter burning tears.



She was not, however, quite by herself. In the next room sat Yagna, in prey to the very same tortures, and like a bird beating its wings against the bars of its cage.

A strange fate it was that had fallen on both alike!

Yagna had arrived sooner than the rest, and, though sombre and black of looks as night, had set to work at once; had milked the cows, watered the calf, even fed the swine; and Hanka wondered, and could hardly believe her own eyes. But Yagna, indifferent to everyone, worked away with a sort of fury, as if to drown her misery in fatigue.

It would not do. Her arms dropped with lassitude, and she thought her back would break, but the tears welled up all the same, and trickled down her cheeks, and her distress and desolation only grew more and more.

Her eyes were so dim, she noted no one around her, not even Pete, who had been at her heels ever since she came home, eager to help, following her everywhere with his eyes, and often approaching so close that she unconsciously moved aside. And at last, when they were both in the granary heaping cut straw into a basket, he caught her by the waist, pushed her close against a partition wall, and sought her lips with a muttered ejaculation.

Engrossed as she was, and unsuspecting of anything more than the rough horse-play of a farm-hand, perhaps rather pleased, too, at finding herself not so absolutely neglected, she suddenly saw his intent when he threw her down on the straw, and pressed his moist hot lips to hers. With the fury of a whirlwind she started up, and cast him from her like a truss of hay; and he measured his length on the threshing-floor!

"You foul eyesore!" she gasped, catching hold of a rake. "You plague-spotted beast! you swineherd, you! Only dare to lay a finger on me again, and I'll break every bone in your body! I'll teach you to make love, and a bloody lesson it will be!"

In a few minutes, however, she thought no more of him, got all her work done, and went into the cabin.

On the threshold she met Hanka. Out of eyes glazed

over with weeping and sorrow, the two exchanged glances—and then passed each other by in a moment.

But the doors of both rooms stood open, and the lamps had been lit, so that they happened every now and then to look at each other.

Later, too, when getting supper ready together, they came closer perforce; though neither breathed a single word. Each well knew what the other had to endure, and they often flung mutual glances of deep rancour, and their dumb set mouths said with silent malice:

"It serves you right—right—right!"

Yet at certain other instants they felt a sort of compassion one for the other, and might have conversed kindly if either of the two had chosen to begin. They even lingered near each other with side-glances of expectation: their hates seemed lulled, and their common hard fate and loneliness were drawing them nearer. But it went no further. Something held them back—now a wail from the little one, now a sense of abasement, now the sharp memory of wrong suffered. And after a time they fell apart again, their resentment awake once more, and their souls sweltering spite afresh.

"It serves you right!—right!—right!" each of them hissed in thought, with flaming eyes, ready for a quarrel, aye, and even for a fight, whereby they might discharge their mutual detestation.

Luckily, it did not go so far; for Yagna went out to her mother's directly after supper.

A warm dark night. In the sombre depths of the sky a few stars twinkled. Upon the marshes lay a thin white film of haze; and there the frogs set up their croaking, and the stray piping of affrighted lapwings sounded now and then. The slumbering trees stood out against the sky, the orchards loomed grey, as though lime-sprinkled, and wafted fragrance as from censers: cherry-blossoms, half-open lilac-buds, water, dew-drenched soil—all breathed perfumes; each particular flower gave out its own sweet scent, all mingling in a deliciously intoxicating aroma.



There were still a few sounds of talk within the village, on the door-steps, about the dwellings now plunged in shade; and people swarmed in the roadways, overshadowed by the trees, and only traversed in places by streaks of light from the windows.

Yagna's intention had been to call on her mother, but she turned aside towards the mill-pond, stopping very frequently; for at every step she met couples, arm about waist, conversing eagerly and in subdued tones.

There were her brother and Nastka, embraced and kissing passionately.

She also came unintentionally upon Mary Balcerek and Vavrek, standing close to a hedgerow, kissing tenderly and forgetful of everything in the world.

There were others whom she knew by their voices. From every shadow about the pond or the fences came whispers, words softly breathed, burning sighs, and sounds of rustling and struggling. The whole village seemed boiling over with tender passion; and even flappers and mere boys were playing at love-making down in the lanes.

A sudden feeling of disgust came over her, together with the resolve to go on at once to her mother's. On the way she met Matthew face to face, but he took no more notice of her than of a tree-stump. He was walking with Teresa, in rapt conversation, both clinging close together; they passed her by, and she still heard their voices and smothered laughter.

Turning back brusquely, she took to her heels as if pursued by a whole pack of dogs, and ran for her cabin.

The evening meanwhile flowed on tranquilly, redolent of spring, instinct with the gladness of all these meetings and all the unearthly serenity of immense happiness.

Far away in the night, either among the sweet-smelling orchards or out in the fields, a flute was twittering a love-tune—the accompaniment, as it were, to all those murmurs and kisses and raptures.

And in the marshes the frogs had set up a grand croaking concert, interrupted at times, while others replied to them

from the mist-covered pond with long slumberous snoring croaks, fainter by degrees; and the youngsters who played about the lanes caught up their song, vying with them with doggerel mimicry.

"The stork's bad, bad, bad:  
May he choke, choke, choke!  
He shall croak, croak, croak,  
And be glad, glad, glad!"



## CHAPTER VIII

**I**T was a delightful day, warm, yet bracing: a day on which the peasant, after a hearty sleep, jumps up as he wakes, and—his prayers first said—sets to work with scarce the shadow of a yawn.

A huge red globe was slowly ascending the sky, on whose immeasurable expanse, amongst a few thin filaments of haze, there floated cluster on cluster of woolly clouds.

The breeze bustled about, with the air of a farmer calling his household up at dawn; rousing the limp corn, blowing away and dispersing the mists, tossing about the overhanging branches, rushing round the orchards and dashing in and scattering the last cherry-blossoms like snow upon the ground.

Lipka too was waking and getting up swiftly. Many a dishevelled head peeped out upon the world with drowsy eyes: some were washing; not a few half-dressed women carried water to their houses. Here a man was splitting logs; there carts were being wheeled out into the roadway. Smoke rose in festoons from the chimneys, and lie-abeds were rated by shrill tongues.

Early it was. The eastern sun was not more than a man's height in the sky, and shooting its ruddy rays aslant through the orchard-trees; yet everybody was already in lively motion.

The wind had fled away somewhere; they enjoyed a pleasant calm, a fresh balmy morning: the sun played upon the waters, from every roof the dew dripped in pearly drops, swallows swept through the clear air, storks seeking a regale flapped away from their nests. Chanticleer beat his wings and crowed lustily on the hedges, and cackling geese led their fledgelings down to the rose-red pond. In the cow-

sheds the cattle lowed: around them and about the yards, cows were being hurriedly milked. From every enclosure they were driving oxen into the roads, and they lumbered along, bellowing lazily, and rubbing themselves against trees and fences; while sheep that went by, lifting their heads and bleating, flocked to the middle of the ways amid clouds of dust. All these were hurried to the open space in front of the church, where elderly peasants on horseback, cracking whips and swearing to the top of their bent, assembled the scattering droves and flocks, and urged the laggards forward.

Somewhat after these came the gooseherds, driving their snowy gagging bands, or one leading a cow, or taking out a hobbled horse to feed in the fallows.

All these, however, had soon passed out, and the rest of the villagers were making ready to go to the fair; this was about a week after the men's return from prison. Everything in Lipka had little by little returned more or less to its usual state.

Not that all was yet as it should be. They were still rather indolent, often lying too long abed. Some paid too frequent visits to the tavern—to be abreast of the news, they said; and not a few would squander half a day going about and gossiping: others would scamp their most pressing work. To get into gear again, when once out, was no easy matter, after such a spell of forced inactivity. But things were improving daily: the tavern had fewer and fewer guests on work-days, for want had caught men by the throats, and was forcing them to labour in the sweat of their brows.

All the same, as that day there was a fair in Tymov, they preferred to go there and put the work off.

Besides, the days of dearth before harvest-time had begun early and with such severity that a bitter cry now arose in most huts. Whatever, then, they still had to sell, they took in all haste to the fair. And others also went, but only to chat with their neighbours and have a look round, and perhaps drink a nip of vodka.



Everyone had his own troubles; and where should people find comfort, or pour out their complaints, or seek words of good advice, unless either at the fair, or at the local festival?

So, no sooner had the cattle been all driven out to graze, those that had carts got them ready, and those that had none started off on foot.

The poorest were first on the road. Filipka, to her sorrow, drove six old geese before her; she had to sacrifice them. Her husband had fallen sick on returning, and she had nothing to put in the pot.

Some *Komorniki*, too, were taking heifers that were but recently with calf. Misery has long legs and sharp claws; and Gregory the Wrymouth had to sell a milch-cow, though he possessed eight acres; while his neighbour Joseph Vahnik was driving a sow with all her farrow.

They had to keep things going as best they could. More than one was so hard up that he was forced to sell his best horse. For instance, Gulbas. He owed Balcerkova fifteen roubles; she had brought an action and obtained a sentence against him. So, amid the tears of his family, the poor wretch went off astride of his chestnut mare to sell it.

Wagon after wagon rolled on close together. Well-to-do farmers were also taking some of their possessions there: they had to pay their taxes, as the Voyt reminded them. Many goodwives likewise were carrying things to the fair: hens clucked under their aprons in carts; and those on foot had eggs or butter in their kerchiefs. Some bore on their shoulders articles of holiday attire, or pieces of linen for sale.

Mass had been said earlier than usual, and more hastily too; and Teresa the soldier's wife, who had to speak with the priest, came just as he was leaving church for his breakfast. She durst not accost him then, and stood waiting outside the garden palings for him to come out; but before she could reach him, he had got into the britzka and driven away to Tymov.

She sighed, looking sorrowfully after him, as he went up the poplar road, whence a cloud of dust continually arose,

to settle down in the fields around: the carts clattered on as before, and a thin line of red petticoats, in Indian file by the roadside, twinkled now and again among the trees. Presently Lipka relapsed into silence. The mill, the smithy, were closed; shortly the roads were also deserted, and all that remained at home were busy at work in the gardens, or pottering about the enclosures.

Teresa went home in sore trouble.

She lived beyond the church, close to Matthew, in a bit of a hut consisting of one large room and the half of a passage! At the division of the property, her brother had halved the cabin, and carried his share away to rebuild it on his own land. The sawn timbers of the roof and walls stood out like gaunt ribs against the soot-begrimed chimney.

Nastka saw her from her threshold, there being but a narrow strip of orchard between them.

"Well? well? has he read your letter?" she cried, running to her.

Teresa explained her disappointment.

"I fancy the organist is able to read writing. He could make it out."

"Certainly; but how can I go empty-handed?"

"Take him a few eggs."

"Here I have ducks' eggs only; Mother has taken the others to sell."

"No matter; he won't refuse ducks' eggs."

"I would fain go; but I fear so much! If I but knew what is written there!" . . . She took from her bosom a letter of her husband, which the Voyt had brought her from the office the day before. "What can there be in that letter?"

Nastka took the grimy paper from her hands and, sitting down on the step of the stile, while Teresa seated herself on the upper bar, made a painful attempt to read it. Teresa, with her hands on her chin, gazed in terror at the cabalistic signs that Nastka was trying to spell out. But she could make out no more than "Praised be Jesus Christ!" at the beginning.



"I cannot read any farther: 'tis useless. But Matthew would manage, no doubt."

She flushed a deep purple, and returned in a faint voice: "O Nastka! I do entreat you, tell him naught of this letter!"

"Were it but in print! I can read any book, I know the letters perfectly.—But I can make nothing of these strokes and crooks and curls. . . . Just like a fly dipped into ink, and crawling over the paper."

"But, Nastka, you'll not tell him?"

"Only yesterday I said to you that I could not be mixed up in this.—But, if your man is coming home, all will have to come out!" she added, rising to her feet.

Teresa could not answer a word; the tears she was trying to keep back choked her.

Nastka withdrew, rather out of humour, calling her fowls as she went; and Teresa, making up five ducks' eggs in a bundle, went to the organist's.

She was a good while getting there, stopping as she did every while, and slinking about in the shade, and staring at the incomprehensible symbols before her.

"Perchance he is returning." . . .

She writhed in the grip of dread, her knees shook, her heart throbbed wildly; with misty eyes she staggered on, as one in sore need of succour; more than once she had to lean against the trees not to fall.

"And perhaps he is only writing about money!" . . .

Her steps began to flag; the letter had become a burden, a torment to her; she was always shifting it from hands to bosom and back again.

Nobody seemed at home at the organist's. All the doors were open, all the rooms empty. One window had a petticoat hung up in lieu of curtain, and a sound of snoring proceeded thence. She advanced timidly towards the passage, looking round her at the yard. A servant-girl was sitting at the kitchen-door, churning butter and driving flies away with a bough.

"Where's your mistress?"

"In the garden; ye'll hear her soon!"

Teresa remained standing there, crushing the letter in her hand, and drawing her kerchief forward over her head, for the sun was now shining directly from above the sheds.

Fowls cackled noisily from the priest's yard, separated only by a hedge from the other: ducks were riotous in pools, little turkeys plaintively clamorous near the hedge; big gobbling turkey-cocks, with drooping wings, made furious onsets at sucking-pigs wallowing in the mire; and pigeons circled in air, slowly settling—a snow-white cloud—on the red roof.

Teresa's eyes were wet. She averted her face to ask:

"Is the organist within?"

"Where else? His Reverence is away, so he has lain down to sleep again."

"The priest has gone to the fair, no doubt?"

"Ah, yes; to purchase a bull."

"What, has he not possessions enough?"

"Whoso has much wants more," the servant grunted.

Teresa was silent awhile. It was hard that she should have so little, and others so much!

"Mistress is coming!" the servant announced, working the dasher up and down in the churn so violently that the cream spurted out.

"'Tis all your doing, lazy boy! you let the horse into the clover on purpose because ye had no mind to go as far as the fallows!" she was heard to scream. "Two rods of clover eaten! But I'll tell your uncle at once, you good-for-nothing, and you'll get such a beating!"

"But I drove it to the fallows myself, I did, and tethered it to the ring!"

"No lies! Your uncle will have a talk with you!"

"But I tell you, Aunt, I did not drive any horse there."

"Who did, then? His Reverence, eh?" she asked sarcastically.

"Ye have guessed, Aunt. Aye, the priest has grazed his horses there," the lad replied, raising his voice.

"Are you mad? Hold your tongue, lest someone hear."

"I will not! To his face I'll say it!—I went at daybreak



to fetch the horses in; the bay one was lying down, the mare feeding: both just where I had left them last night. I loosed them and mounted the bay one, when I saw horses grazing in our clover. It was grey dawn.—I rode on aslant, nigh the priest's garden, to head them off; so I passed along Klemba's pathway. And then I saw the priest saying his breviary, and looking round, and whipping his horses further and further into the clover!"

"Hush, Michael! . . . What an unheard-of thing! . . . The priest himself! . . . I always said that last year's hay . . . But silence; here comes a woman."

She waddled in hurriedly, and the organist called for Michael from under his bed-clothes.

Teresa handed over her eggs, embraced the goodwife's knees, and begged to know the contents of her husband's letter.

"Just wait a little."

Some time later, they called her into the room. The organist, scantily attired—in shirt and drawers only—was taking his morning coffee. He began to read to her.

Her heart died within her as she listened. Yes, he—her husband—was coming back at harvest-time, along with Kuba Yarchyk of Vola, and Gregory, Boryna's son! The letter was affectionate: he longed to see her, asked about everyone at home, sent messages to his acquaintances, and felt brimming over with gladness at the thought of returning. Gregory added a few words, asking her to tell his father he was coming. Poor fellow! he little knew what had taken place.

Those kind words smote Teresa like a whip and cut her to the heart. She did her best to bear up against this dreadful news, but her eyes were soon wet and streamed with tell-tale drops.

"How pleased she is that her goodman is coming!" the organist's wife said, with derisive emphasis.

At the words, she wept yet more abundantly, and took to flight that they should not see her break down yet more. For a long time she went crouching about the hedges.

"What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?" she cried helplessly, in bitter pain.

Her Goodman was coming . . . and would learn everything! Terror, like a destroying blast, swept over her at the thought. Her Yasyek was a good-natured fellow, but very impetuous, like all the Ploshkas. Never would he forgive the wrong done; he would kill him. "O Lord, have mercy!" she cried, but without one thought for herself. Full of tears and rent within her soul, she found her way after a time to Boryna's cabin. Hanka was out; she had left long since; Yagna was working at her mother's. Only Yagustynka and Yuzka were at home, spreading out linen to bleach in the orchard.

She told them about Gregory, wishing to get away at once. But the old woman took her aside, and said in a low and unusually kind tone:

"Teresa, control yourself; be reasonable. Evil mouths cannot be prevented from speaking. . . . Your Yasyek will return, and will know all in any case. Think of it: a lover is but for a month, a husband for life. 'Tis good advice I give."

"What do ye mean?" she stammered, feigning not to understand.

"Do not pretend: we all know all about you both. Send Matthew about his business while it is yet time. If ye do, Yasyek will not believe what they say. He has been yearning for you; easily will you make him believe anything! Matthew has had a liking for your bed, but is not bound to it: get rid of him while you can. . . . A love! it passes by in a moment, as yesterday has passed: were you to lay down your life for it, it would not stay. A love—'tis but a Sunday dainty: who feeds on it daily will care not for it at all.—Folk say: 'Love of heart makes us smart: when we wed, then we're dead!'—It may be; but death with a Goodman and children is better than wild outlawed freedom.—Do not whimper, but save yourself while it still is time. What if your man should cease to love you, because of this your deed, and chase you from his home? Whither should



you go? To your ruin: to be the laughing-stock of everyone! Fool! Every man has breeches: Matthew and Kuba, both alike: everyone swears the same oaths, and is sweet as honey so long as his fondness endures.—Now think well, and take to heart what I say; for I, your aunt, wish you well.”

But Teresa would hear no more. She fled away into the fields, and sat down in the rye to give a free course to her grief.

But it was in vain that she attempted to think over Yagustynka's advice. Her passion for Matthew was such that the very idea of giving him up made her writhe on the ground like a wounded beast.

Some time elapsed before the sounds of a quarrel close at hand made her start to her feet.

Just in front of the Voyt's cottage a fierce brawl was in progress.

The Voyt's wife and Kozlova were loading each other with the fiercest invectives.

Opposite to one another they stood, with the road and their respective enclosures between them, clad only in their smocks and petticoats, each panting with fury, reviling the other with all her might, and shaking her fists at her.

The Voyt was loading his cart, and now and then glancing at a peasant from Modlitsa, who, sitting in the porch, enjoyed the scene with keen relish, and set the women on.

The cries were heard afar; and soon many a head peeped from behind the neighbouring hedges and hut-corners.

And, Lord! how they both stormed! The Voyt's wife, usually so quiet and mild-tempered, was terribly on the rampage to-day, and her rage waxed higher every minute; and Kozlova, as of set purpose, taunted and mocked her, omitting nothing to increase her fury.

“Talk, talk, talk, my lady Voyt!” she called out; “talk away! There's no dog can outbark your ladyship!”

“Not a week goes by, but something is missing from my premises! Laying hens—chickens—even an old goose—have disappeared. Aye, in my garden, in my orchard, I

have untold losses to put up with! Ah, may the wrong done to me poison you! May it choke you to death!"

"Very good!—Screech, old crow! Screech, my lady Voyt! 'Twill soothe you!"

"Why, this very day," she said, addressing Teresa, who stood in the road, "I had taken five pieces of linen out into the orchard to bleach. . . . After breakfast, behold, I come out to sprinkle them—one is missing! . . . I seek it!—Swallowed by the earth, as it were!—And lo, I had weighted it with stones; and of wind there was none at all! . . . Good linen, fine linen! Ye could get none better at any shop . . . and behold, it is gone!"

"Your eyelids are so puffed out with fat, you could not see it!"

"I could not, for you, thief, have stolen it!" she vociferated.

"I, a thief!—Say, oh, say that once more!"

"You thief! you thief! Thereto, and before all men, will I bear witness! And that you'll confess when I take you to jail in irons!"

"She—she has called me a thief!—People, have ye heard? As there's a God, I'll bring an action for that.—Ye all have heard her. What, have I robbed you, you blockhead? where are your witnesses?"

At that, the Voyt's wife snatched up a stake, and dashed out into the road with the rush of an infuriated dog, shrieking: "I'll witness it on you with my stick! I'll prove it! I'll . . ."

"Come on, my lady Voyt! Yah! only touch me, you pig! Only touch me, you scarecrow of a bitch!" she cried, running forward likewise.

She pushed aside her goodman, who would have kept her back, and with legs wide apart and arms akimbo, called out jeering:

"Strike me, strike me, my lady Voyt, and you'll lie in jail for it!"

"Hold your peace, woman!" the Voyt interposed, "or I'll send you off to jail first!"



"Lock up your own mad dog, 'tis your duty; tie up your wife with a rope, lest she bite!" Kozlova screamed, exasperated.

"Woman!" he shouted, threatening her. "When I speak, do respect my office!"

"I spit on your office"—but the words used were bolder far—"do you understand me? He threaten, he?—Look at him! He may just as well have stolen the stuff himself to get his light-o'-love a smock! Why, the money of the community is all gone that way; you have drunk it all, you toss-pot!—Oh, we know about your doings, never fear!—Aye, you too, my lord the Voyt, will lie in jail!"

This was the last straw: both of them flew at her like wolves. The Voyt's wife hit her first with her stick across the face, and then, with a savage cry, went at her with her nails, while the Voyt belaboured her wherever he could find a place.

Bartek flew instantly to the rescue of his wife.

They all three closed together like fighting dogs; no one could tell whose fists, whose heads, were seen whirling through the air, nor whose voices were bellowing. From fence to road, from road to fence, they went staggering and tossing like sheaves blown along in a great wind, till in their fury of fighting they fell to the ground on a sandheap.

Plunging in a cloud of dust, they were audible still with their imprecations and invectives; but presently they got out into the road, fighting and shrieking at the top of their voices.

At times one or other of them fell apart, and now and then they were all upon their feet; then, clutching one another by the hair, or the throat, or the nape of the neck, they began the battle again.

But all the village was soon aroused by the noise; women came hovering helplessly around the battle-field; and at last men arrived and separated the combatants.

But the curses and imprecations and wailings and threats went on, and were beyond all description. The neighbours

made off at once, fearing they might be called in to bear witness: but throughout the village the whisper went that the Voyt and his wife had given the Koziols a fearful thrashing.

A few minutes later, the Voyt, with a swollen face, drove off accompanied by his wife, also much battered and scratched, to depose against their enemies.

About an hour afterwards, the Koziols started likewise: old Ploshka having very kindly offered to take them to town gratis—to pay out the Voyt for siding with the Squire.

They went to make their complaint, just as they were at the end of the fight, and without doing anything to make themselves more presentable.

They drove slowly through the village, telling everybody, as they went, about their ill-treatment, and showing the wounds received.

Koziol's head was cut open to the bone, so that his face, neck, and breast, visible through a rent in his shirt, were all covered with blood. The hurt was in reality not great; but at every moment he would press his side and moan:

"My God! I can bear no more! He has broken every one of my ribs!—Help, good people, help! or I die!"

His wife then took up the lament.

"He took a club to beat him with!—Ah, poor man! be easy; you have had much to suffer, but there's justice to punish ruffians, there is! . . . Yes, he meant to slay my man, and folk had hard work to prevent him from doing it: as they will all testify in court." These explanations she would frequently interrupt with dreadful howls. Indeed, she was disfigured almost past recognition: bare-headed, with tufts of hair torn out scalp and all, her ears torn and bleeding, her eyes running blood, and her whole face clawed, scratched, harrowed like a field. And though all knew well what a "daisy" the woman was, the sight roused pity in many a heart.

"Dear, dear! 'twas too bad to treat them so horribly!"

"A sin and a shame it is! They have been well-nigh killed."



"Aye, they have been frightfully beaten. But is aught forbidden to my lord the Voyt?—Such an official, such a great man?" Ploshka put in maliciously, addressing the people.

They were completely bewildered, and remained astounded and upset long after the Koziols had passed out of sight.

Teresa, who had taken cover during the fray, did not show her face till both parties had gone.

She looked in at the Koziols', Bartek being distantly related to her. No one was in; but the three little children that Kozlova had just brought with her from Warsaw, sat outside the cabin, huddled together, greedily devouring some half-boiled potatoes, defending their food from the pigs with their spoons, and crying out at them. They were so wretched, so miserably neglected, so filthily dirty, that her heart pitied them, and she took them into the passage, and shut them in from their foes; then she ran off to tell the news.

At the Golabs', there was no one but Nastka.

Matthew had, before breakfast, gone over to Staho (Bylitsa's son-in-law) to look over the ruined hut and see if anything could be done with it. The old man, too, was with him, now and then stammering a word or two. Mr. Yacek, sitting as usual at the threshold, smoked a cigarette and whistled to the doves that circled about over the cherry-trees.

Noontide was not far off.

The heated air was quivering over the fields like rippling water; the fields and orchard-grounds basked delightedly in the sunbeams; now and again, a blossom fell from Bylitsa's cherry-trees, flickering down like a white little butterfly.

It was well past noon when Matthew had finished his examination. While still poking the timbers here and there, he gave sentence:

"'Tis all rotten wood, crumbling to dust: ye can build nothing with it. Quite useless."

"Perchance," Staho said anxiously, "I might buy some new timber, and then . . ."

"Ye'd require timber for a whole cabin. Not one beam here is fit for aught."

"Gracious heavens!"

"But the lower beams may hold yet," old Bylitsa faltered; "we should only have to get new upper timbers, and clamp the woodwork together and prop it up."

"Then do so, if ye be so clever! I do not build with touchwood!" he retorted, putting on his coat.

Here Veronka, lamenting bitterly, and holding a child in her arms, came on the scene.

"What, alas! what shall we do now?"

"A new hut," said Staho in sore distress, "would cost about two thousand roubles.—Yet we might get some timber from our forest; and I could manage for the rest. . . . An application to the Government Board . . ."

"But the forest is now in the hands of the law court: what timber would they give us just now? Why, we are even forbidden to gather wood there for fuel! Wait till a sentence is given, and then build!" was Matthew's advice.

"Indeed! Very fine!—And where shall we dwell this winter, I ask?" said Veronka, with a fresh burst of tears.

No more was said. Matthew put his tools together, while Staho scratched his head, and Bylitsa blew his nose round the corner.

In that moment, Mr. Yacek stood up, and raising his voice:

"Weep not, Veronka," he said; "the timber for your cabin shall be found!"

All stood open-mouthed, lost in amazement; till Matthew, recovering himself first, burst out with a loud guffaw.

"Clever men promise, fools believe them!—He has not where to lay his head, yet talks of giving cabins to others!" he cried roughly, staring at him under his bent brows; but Mr. Yacek sat down again, went on smoking and playing with his beard, his eyes fixed on the sky-line.

"In a little, he will promise you a whole farm!" Matthew said, with a laugh and a shrug, as he left them.



He at once turned to the left along the path that led to the outhouses.

Few were at work in the gardens that day: there was but the red glint of a stray petticoat, or the sight of a man here and there mending a roof, or pottering about the granary gates, open to the fields.

Matthew was in no hurry; he loitered about willingly, chatting with the neighbours on the topic of the Voyt's battle, grinning and talking merrily with lasses, or making such strong-flavoured jokes with the elder women in the gardens that they could not help laughing; many a one sighed and cast fond looks after him, as he passed out of sight.

And a handsome fellow indeed he was: built like an oak, and the king, as it were, of all the young men in Lipka; first in strength (after Antek Boryna); and as a dancer, not inferior to Staho Ploshka. And withal, a man of much ability in every field of work; able to construct a cart, to set up a chimney, to repair a cabin; and he played the flute beautifully too. So, though he had next to no land at all, and was so open-handed with everybody that he never put anything by, many a mother would have gladly drunk with him the price of a calf, could she but have disposed him favourably thereby towards marriage with her daughter; more than one girl, too, had allowed him much intimacy, hoping to get the banns sooner published.

All would not do. He drank with the mothers, made love to the daughters, but on the question of marriage was slippery as an eel.

"'Tis hard to choose.—Each one has her good points; and others are growing up, worth more than any.—I'll wait," he would say, when match-makers beset him.

Then, the preceding winter, he had that entanglement with Teresa, and lived almost openly with her, disregarding both gossip and cautions.

"When Yasyek comes, I'll give her back to him, and he'll stand me treat into the bargain for having taken good care of her," he once said laughingly, shortly after his return. He was tired of her, and slowly drifting apart.

And now, as he went in to dinner, he chose a longer way round, merely to joke with the girls, and have some horse-play with those who would let him.

And thus, quite unexpectedly, he came face to face with Yagna, weeding her mother's garden.

"Ah! Yagna!" he cried out, joyfully.

She suddenly shot up to her full height, tall and graceful as a hollyhock.

"So you've noticed me? Oh, how very soon! Not more than a week since your home-coming!"

"Why, you look lovelier than ever before!" he said in low tones of wonder.

Her dress was tucked up to the knees; and beneath her red kerchief, knotted under her chin, those great sweet turquoise eyes of hers looked out, her white teeth gleamed between cherry lips, all her face glowed apple-red—and so fair, it seemed asking to be kissed.

She boldly set her arms akimbo, and shot such irresistibly bright glances at him as thrilled him through and through. Looking round carefully, he drew nearer.

"For a whole week I have been seeking you—in vain!"

"Tell a dog lies: it may believe you.—Ha! the man goes grinning about the gardens every evening; every evening he flatters another girl: and now he'll dare tell me 'tis not true?"

"Why, Yagna, is this your greeting to me?"

"Better fall on my knees and thank you for remembering I exist, eh?"

"Last year I had another welcome!"

"But this is not last year!" She turned away from him and hid her face. He at once stepped forward, clasping her with eager arms.

She tore herself in anger from his grasp.

"Let me alone; Teresa would tear my eyes out because of you!"

"Yagna!" he sighed.

"Get back; make love to her, the soldier's wife; render her every service till he come back to her.—You were in



prison, and she fed you well: now must you make her some return!"

Each word of hers was like a blow, and uttered with such scorn that Matthew, taken aback, could find no answer.

Shame took hold of him; he turned a dusky red, hung his head and took to flight at once.

Though Yagna had but told him what she felt and had been feeling all the week, she now regretted her words. Never had she expected he would have been so offended as to leave her.

"Foolish one! I spoke but out of spite!" she thought, gazing sorrowfully after him. "To be so angry all at once with me!—Matthew!"

Rushing away through the orchard as if running for his life, he did not hear her call.

"That wasp! that vixen!" he growled, making straight for home now, anger and astonishment alternately uppermost in his mind. Before, she had always been so sweet, so mild! And now she had treated him like dirt. He felt the shame so keenly that he looked round to make sure no one had heard.

"And she reminded me of Teresa! Silly thing!—Teresa is naught to me—naught but a toy!—How her eyes blazed! In what a posture she set her arms!—Ah, it were no shame to be stung by such a one . . . if only the honey were forthcoming afterwards." He was now close to his hut, and slackened his pace.

"She was angry that I alluded to the past.—But was I in the wrong? . . . As to Teresa"—here he made a wry face, as one who has gulped down vinegar—"I have enough of that cry-baby. I have taken no oath to remain with her, have I? . . . The tail sticks to the cow, but I am no cow's tail! . . . And then she has a goodman of her own; and I might get a public rebuke from the pulpit on her account. . . . Such a woman is the ruin of a man.—To the devil with women!" he concluded, in a most cantankerous mood.

Dinner was not ready at home. He scolded his sister

for dawdling, and went in to Teresa, who was milking in the orchard, and raised to him very sad tearful eyes.

"Whimpering again? And wherefore?"

She excused herself, looking on him fondly.

"Pay more attention: the udder squirts milk upon your petticoat."

Why was he so unkind, so hard to her to-day? she wondered. What had come over him? She was as gentle as could possibly be; yet he snapped her up fiercely at every word she said.

He seemed looking about the orchard for something, but ever and anon flung a furtive glance at her, and wondered more and more.

"Where had I mine eyes? . . . Such a paltry flabby thing! . . . Neither beauty nor savour! . . . Raw-boned and sour-tasting! . . . Black as a gipsy, too; and of carriage, none whatever!"

True, her eyes, and they alone, were beautiful; perhaps as much so as Yagna's: large, bright as a blue sky, and peering under black brows. But as often as he met them, he turned aside and swore softly to himself.

"She rolls her eyes like a calf!"

Those looks of hers made him impatient and angry.

"I will not see them, I will not!—Yes, yes, ogle as much as you like, ye will not catch me."

They had dinner together, but he never spoke once to her, nor so much as glanced in her direction. To Nastka he spoke, indeed, but no pleasant words.

"A dog would not touch these groats: they are disgustingly burnt!"

"Only a little: just enough to have a taste."

"Do not cross me!—And ye have put more flies than bacon-scratchings in them!"

"What, do you object to flies now? Don't be so very dainty! They will not poison you."

The cabbage dish, he then complained, had been cooked with rancid lard.

"Ye might as well have seasoned it with axle-grease!"



"You don't know how that would taste? I do not, nor will I try," she returned sharply.

But he continued to seek every occasion to grumble. Teresa was dumb all the time; so he set at her directly after dinner, seeing her cow rubbing herself at the corner of the hut.

"She's filthy with dung, crusted all over: can ye not rub her down?"

"Our byre is wet, and she gets dirty there."

"Wet, indeed!" he vociferated. "There are pine-boughs enough in the forest for dry fodder: but ye must wait for someone to collect them and bring them here to you. And the beasts might rot their flanks off with the dung meanwhile.—So many women in the hut, yet not a stiver's worth of cleanliness!"

But Teresa never answered back; she durst not defend herself, and only begged his mercy with her eyes.

She was quiet and obedient, and as hard-working as an ant: she felt even glad to see him so masterful and high-handed with her! Which was precisely what angered him yet more. Those loving timorous eyes enraged him; so did her quiet footsteps, her humble mien, her way of following him about. He was on the point of crying out: "Away from my sight!"

"Blood of a dog!—Plague take it all!" he exclaimed at last; and, taking up his tools, without any after-dinner rest, he passed over to the Klembas', where he had something to do about the hut.

They were all out in the yard, and at dinner still.

He sat down by the wall for a smoke.

The Klembas were talking of Gregory Boryna's return from the army.

"What? home so soon?" he asked.

"Why, know ye not?" said old Klemba. "Together with Yasyek, Teresa's goodman, and Yarchyk from Vola."

"They are to be here in harvest-time. This morning, Teresa went to get the letter read by the organist, who told

me about it.—That's news for you, that Yasyek is returning!" he blurted out.

A silence followed. All eyes were fixed on vacancy, and the women, stifling their desire to laugh, turned very red. He gave no heed, and seemed pleased at the news, remarking tranquilly:

"'Tis well that he returns: now they will peradventure cease from slandering Teresa."

Their spoons stopped, suspended in air over the dish, so confounded were they all. He looked round him, unabashed, and then added:

"Ye are well aware how little they spare her. She is naught to me but a distant relative on my father's side. But if any dirty sneak should hint at anything else, I'd stop his mouth so that he'd never forget it! But women are the worst of all; they never spare another woman. Be she white as snow, they would find means to foul her!"

"Quite so, quite so," they replied, with their eyes upon the dish.

"Have ye been at Boryna's yet?" he inquired, anxiously.

"I have long been about to go; but something always prevented me."

"He suffers for us all, and we—we forget him!"

"And you—have you looked in there?"

"I?—Should I go in by myself, folk would say I was after Yagna!"

"As particular as a girl after she has tripped!" muttered old Agata, who sat by the hedge, with a small bowl on her knees.

"Well, but I have enough of all this yelping."

Klemba laughed. "The wolf," he said, "changes his life when his teeth are gone."

"Or," Matthew added, "when he thinks of settling down."

"Ho, ho! we shall soon have you sending messengers to some lass?" young Klemba cried in high glee.

"Aye, I am weighing the matter seriously."



"Make your choice quickly, Matthew, and ask me to be your bridesmaid!" piped Kate, the eldest daughter.

"Ah, but there's the rub. All are equally excellent, and every one's better than the other. Magda's the richest, but she's toothless and blear-eyed; Ulisia's a flower, but has one hip too big, and no dowry but a barrel of sourcrout; Franka has a baby; Mary is too friendly to all the boys; Eva has a hundred *złoty*, all in coppers; but she's a sluggard, always lying abed. All would fain eat fat things, drink sweet things, and do nothing. Oh, they are pure gold, these girls! And others there are besides, nice, but not yet grown up."

They all laughed till the pigeons flew off the roof.

"I say true. Till she is grown up, I care naught for a girl, be she ever so comely."

Here Dame Klemba rebuked him for talking of such things.

"Oh, I am only joking. And girls like these jokes, they say, as well as any."

At this the lasses were offended, and grew red as turkeys in angry protest.

"A fine fellow he is: not one of us is good enough for him!"

"If there are none in Lipka you can like, then take one from elsewhere!" they cried.

"But there are, there are! 'Tis easier to find an old maid here than a silver *złoty*. Ah, how many there are! They every Saturday beautify themselves at daybreak very thoroughly, and braid their hair, and chase chickens through the orchard to barter with the Jew for vodka, and are all the afternoon on the watch for messengers bringing a proposal. Why, have I not seen them on the roofs, waving their kerchiefs at me, and shouting: 'Come to me, Matthew, come!'?—And the mothers, too, taking up the cry: 'To Kate first, Matthew, to Kate! I'll add to her portion—a cheese and eight eggs: Matthew, come to Kate!'"

The men were near splitting their sides with laughter, he

amused them so; but the girls, indignant, made such an uproar that old Klemba interposed:

"Hush, girls! ye're as noisy as magpies before rain."

The din went on nevertheless. So, to end the squabble, he inquired:

"Were you present, Matthew, at the Voyt's affray?"

"Not I. But the Koziols were very soundly swung, they say."

"Aye, swung with a vengeance! They were awful to behold.—Well, well, the Voyt has had his fling, i' faith."

"He has waxed fat on the Commune's bread, and now he plays pranks!"

"Aye, indeed, he fears none. Who would stand up to him? Any other should pay dear for such sport—he'll not lose a hair thereby. He knows men in office, and can do as he pleases here."

"Because ye are but sheep to let him. He puts you down, and sets himself above you all!"

"Having chosen him ourselves, we must respect his rule."

"But they that set him up can put him down again."

"Hush, Matthew, not so loud: folk may hear your words."

"—And tell him. Then he'll know what I have said.—Let him fall foul of me, though, if he dare!"

"Matthias, who alone could have held against him, is at death's door. No one else would put himself forward: each has troubles enough of his own," the old man concluded, rising from his seat.

All rose with him, and went, some to rest awhile, some to stretch their legs and loosen their girdles; others—the lasses—to wash the dishes in the pond, and take a little recreation. But Matthew went directly to set up props and stays for the cabin, while Klemba lit his pipe and sat on the door-step.

As he puffed, his mind reverted to the late talk. "Who stands up for others, shall have many bothers!" he growled.

The sun was high above the cabin, the afternoon hot. The orchards stood motionless, the sunlight trembled



through their rustling leaves, and many a petal floated down upon the grass. Bees buzzed among the apple-tree boughs; athwart the greenery, the mill-pond shimmered, and the birds were all hushed. A pleasant afternoon drowsiness pervaded the place.

Klemba, who wanted to keep awake, sauntered over to his potato-pit.

A little later he returned, puffing hard at his extinguished pipe, and spluttering, and throwing back the long hair that had fallen over his brow.

"Have you seen?" his wife asked him, peeping out at the door.

"I have. Our potatoes will only last us till harvest, if we cook them but once a day!"

"Once a day only!"

"What's to be done? We are so many!—Ten hungry mouths, the ravenous maws beneath them!—We must think of something."

"Not of the heifer, at any rate. I tell you, I will not have her sold. Do what ye will, the cattle must not go!"

He waved his hands, as if to drive away an importunate wasp; when she had gone, he lit his pipe again.

"A pig-headed old thing! . . . If needs must . . . A heifer's no holy thing to die for!"

The sun now shone in his eyes; he only turned his back, and puffed more slowly. Loosening his girdle (the meal of potatoes lay heavy upon him), he began to nod. The doves cooed on the thatch, and the leaves were quivering with slumberous murmurs.

"Thomas!"

It was Agata's voice. He opened his eyes. She was sitting beside him, with an anxious look.

"These months before harvest are hard times for you," she said. "If ye are willing, I have a little money: ye could take it. I was keeping it for my burial; but if ye are so hard pressed, I'll lend it. Why sell the heifer? I stood by when she was dropped; she's of a good race of

milkers. Perchance I may, God willing, live on till harvest . . . and then ye will give the money back. 'Tis no shame, even for a farmer, to take from his own folk, when in need. So here!" And she pressed into his hand three roubles, all in silver *zloty*.

"Nay, take it back: I shall manage."

"Here, I can add half a rouble more. Take it," she begged him in a whisper.

"Nay. But thanks notwithstanding. It is exceeding kind of you."

"There, then: here are thirty *zloty* all told: pray take them!" She looked into her money-bag, counting out five-kopek bits and keeping down her tears. It was a hard sacrifice for her; every coin she told out gave her a sharp pang.

The money glittered very temptingly in the sun. His eyes shone with desire as he gloated over them; they were all new bright pieces. But, heaving a deep sigh, he mastered himself with a great effort, and said to her:

"Hide all that carefully, or folk may see it, and per-adventure rob you."

She still went on imploring him in a low voice; but he said no more, and she slowly put her treasures back again.

"Wherefore will ye not dwell with us?" he asked her, after a while.

"How can I? I am good for nothing, not even to follow the geese—I am very weak, expecting my end day by day. It would truly be more pleasant to die amongst one's own kinsfolk: much more. Yea, even in the stall where the heifer has been.—And I have forty *zloty* ready for my burial: perhaps 'twould also suffice for a Mass . . . as befits a farmer's kinswoman! . . . I should leave my feather-bed to you. . . . Fear ye not: I should fall asleep quietly amongst you, and sooner than ye expect; very soon . . ." she faltered anxiously, waiting with a throbbing heart for him to say: "Stay with us!"

He did not, but made as if he had not followed the drift of her rambling talk; and stretched himself, and yawned,



and walked uneasily about before the hut, the barn, the hayrick. . . .

She sobbed and moaned plaintively. "How could he, indeed? He, a husbandman of such repute—and I, a wretched beggar-woman!"

And thereupon she started on her daily search for some place in the village where she could die in good odour, as a respectable peasant-woman.

On and on she crawled to find some such nook, and ever drifting about like gossamer in the gale, to stick fast no one knows where.

People joked about her, and enjoyed saying that she ought to stay with her family, and telling the Klembas, with mock friendship:

"Why, she is of your family, and she has money for her funeral besides, and then she will not trouble you very long. Where else should she be but with you?"

Dame Klemba thought of those words, when her goodman told her at night of what Agata had said that day. They were in bed at the time, their children had begun to snore, and she whispered to persuade him:

"There will be room for her . . . She may lie in the hay . . . Or we shall drive the geese out into the shed.—For her food, she wants next to naught . . . And she cannot drag on very long . . . Moreover, she will be buried at her own cost.—So people will not speak against us . . . And then, the feather-bed would be ours: we could not easily get such another one." This she pointed out to him very eagerly.

In answer, Klemba merely snored at the time; but in the morning he said:

"If Agata were quite destitute, I should take her in; it were then God's will, and I could not do otherwise. But, as things stand, they will say we have taken her in for the sake of what she leaves us. As it is, they blame us for having let her go and beg.—Nay, it cannot be."

Klembova obeyed her husband in all things, but she

sighed bitterly over the feather-bed lost to them, and got up to hurry the girls out to their work; for that day they had to plant the cabbages.

It was then May weather at its best. The breeze blew, stirring the corn in rippling waves. The orchards whispered as they waved, and shook down their blossoming petals; and heavy clusters of lilac and bird-cherry blossoms filled the air with perfume. From the fields, songs came borne on the wind; and in the smithy, the hammer rang on the anvil. Since morning, the roads had been full of people and racket, and the women wended their way to the cabbage patches, bearing young plants with them in sieves and baskets.

Before the morning dew was quite dry, the black fields, cut into many a furrow full of water sparkling in the sunshine, were dappled all over with red aprons and skirts.

Dame Klemba went with her daughters, the while her goodman with his sons were helping Matthew to repair their cabin.

Old Klemba, however, presently finding the sun too hot, called Balcerek and went over to see Boryna.

"A fine day, friend," he said, taking a pinch from Balcerek's snuff-box.

"Splendid. But let's hope this great heat will not last."

"Rain is falling on all sides: our turn must come soon."

"Yet it looks like drought: the trees are covered with insects."

"And the vegetables, how late they have come up! A drought would destroy them. But, by God's grace, it may not come to that."

"Well, and what of the fair? Any news of your horse?"

"I gave the police officer three roubles, and he gave me promises."

"We have naught in safety! We live in constant alarm, as hares do, and there's no help for it."

"Our Voyt is a mere figure-head," suggested Balcerek, in low cautious tones.



"We ought," Klemba rapped out, "to seek another."

Balcerek gave him a warning look; but he went on, excitedly:

"He brings the village to shame.—Have ye heard what he did yesterday?"

"Oh, his brawl? that's naught.—But there's more, and we may have to pay dear for his spell in office."

"But there are checks on him: the cashier, the scrivener, the rest of the council."

"Like dogs set to watch over meat! Aye, they'll watch so well that we peasants will have in the end to pay for their negligence."

"What's to be done?—Any other news?"

Balcerek spat and tossed up his hand; he cared little to talk, being a cross-grained man, and henpecked besides, which made him still more taciturn.

They arrived at Boryna's. In the porch, Yuzka was peeling potatoes.

"Ye may go in; Father is lying there alone. Hanka is out planting cabbages, and Yagna working at her mother's."

The room looked very empty. A lilac-bough now and then peeped in at the window, and the sunlight filtered in through the verdure outside.

The old man lay as usual, but much emaciated, with his grey beard bristling all over his discoloured cheeks. His head was still bandaged, and his ashen lips were moving as if to speak.

They greeted him. No answer, no movement in reply.

"Do ye not know us?" said Klemba, taking his hand.

He seemed totally unconscious, or lost in rapt listening to the twittering swallows, building their nests under his thatch, or the brustling of the leaves against the wall outside.

"Matthias!" Klemba said, shaking him slightly.

The sick man started, his eyelids quivered, he looked round at them.

"Do ye hear?—This is Klemba, this Balcerek, your companions: surely ye know us!"

They waited a little, gazing into his eyes.

"Boys!" he cried suddenly, in a thundering voice. "See me here alone! To the rescue! Smite them, those sons of dogs! smite them!" He raised his arms as to ward off a blow, and fell back on his bed.

At the cry, Yuzka rushed in, and put fresh moist bandages on his head. And now, once more, he lay quite motionless: in his wide-open eyes there gleamed an expression of intense fear.

They went away, distressed and disheartened.

"Why," said Klemba, "he is no longer a living man . . . he's a corpse!"

Vitek's stork was stalking about the orchard; the wind now and then swept the branches into the open windows to shade them.

Back they went, plunged in sad silent thought, as if they had been to visit a grave.

"We must all come to this!" Klemba said at last.

"Truly," sighed the other. "He has perished, and others gain thereby."

"A goat dies once, and then—never again!"

"We too shall follow him shortly."

And they looked with hardening eyes at the world around; at the waving corn; at the forest, clear-cut and plain in the distance; at the green-growing fields, and at the bright warm day of springtide: and their spirits settled down in a stony resignation to the will of God.

"No; man cannot shun what is to be."

And so they parted.

Others, too, both on that day and afterwards, came to visit the dying man: but he recognized no one, and at last they came no longer.

The priest had said: "All he needs is prayers for a speedy departure."

And as everyone was full of his own cares and troubles, they naturally forgot him, or spoke of him as of one dead.

Who was there, indeed, to take thought of him?



There were even days when he remained without a drop of water, and might have died of starvation, but for the kind heart of Vitek, who would snatch up anything he could get and take it to "Master"; and he would sometimes milk the cows in secret, and bring him to drink. He was indeed filled with attention and respect for the sufferer, and with disquietude also: which made him at last question Pete:

"Is't true that whosoever dies without confession must go to hell?"

"Most true. Why, the priest tells us so in church ever so often."

"Then . . . Master shall also go to hell?" And he crossed himself in dismay.

"He's a man like any other!"

"What? Master a man like any other?"

"You are as senseless as a cabbage-head!" said Pete, growing angry; for he saw that Vitek did not believe him. . . . And thus did the days go by at Boryna's cabin.

The village meanwhile, on account of the Voyt's battle, was in a state of great animation, each party eagerly looking for witnesses in its favour.

It was of no great importance in itself: yet the Voyt exerted himself with might and main; and his influence in Lipka proved so considerable that more than half the inhabitants were on his side. They knew him to be no saint; but he was their Voyt all the same, and able to make things hot for opponents. So, by dint of insistence, flattery, and vodka, he got together as many witnesses as he required.

Koziol was very ill in bed, and the priest had been to him with the last sacraments. As to that illness, opinions differed: some went so far as to whisper low that it was only a feint to give the Voyt more trouble.—But who knew really what to think of it?

In the meantime Kozlova was going about all day, telling the people that she had sold her sow and farrow to purchase medicines for her goodman; and well-nigh daily she stationed herself outside the Voyt's house, loading him

with invectives, shrieking that her Bartek was about to die, and calling God and all honest people to witness in her favour and take sides with her.

Only the riff-raff of the community, however, and a few tender-hearted women, were with her; Kobus also, a third-rate farmer and a most litigious and quarrelsome man. The others would not listen to her. Some paid no notice to what she said; others, in her own interest, advised her to make friends with the Voyt.

Many broils arose thence; for Kobus had an ungovernable tongue, and was very ready with his fists; while the women, on their side, used extremely violent language. Their anger and acrimony were most intense: for how could they hope to get the better of the farmers and the Voyt together?

In the end, the Jew himself treated the Kozioles with contempt, and refused them credit.

Within a week after the battle, everyone had enough of the affair, and the complaints and lamentations connected therewith, and would not listen any longer.

But at that juncture, new helpers came, and the village was again in an uproar.

Ploshka, joining forces with the miller, now stood up openly and strongly for the Kozioles.

Not that they cared for their cause in the least: each had his own aims and sought his own advantage.

Ploshka, an underhanded and much-aspiring man, put unbounded trust in his own wealth and cleverness: and as to the miller, he would have risked his life for money.

And thus the struggle between the two parties began, fierce, yet courteous: they treated each other to shows of friendship, and conversed as before, and even went sometimes arm in arm to the tavern together.

The shrewder Lipka folk were soon aware that this coalition aimed at something more than the mere redress of Koziole's grievance—possibly at the Voyt's office itself.

And the elders nodded their heads, saying:

"One man has made a good thing by the office: others may do so too!"



And as the days passed by, the village dissensions increased.

Once, about that time, there came round to every hut the news that there were Germans stopping at the tavern.

As someone guessed, they were no doubt bound for Podlesie.

The people were taken with a fit of uneasy curiosity. The news flew from orchard to orchard, it was discussed over the fences, and many a one hurried to the tavern to see.

It was true. Five large tilted wagons, each painted yellow and blue, and fitted with iron axle-trees, stood outside the inn. They were laden with articles of furniture, and women were sitting inside. In the tavern bar, ten Germans were drinking.

They were tall, stout, bearded fellows, clad in dark-blue capotes, with silver chains that dangled from their bulging waists, and faces that literally shone with good feeding.

The peasants stood grouped together at a distance from them, calling for vodka, looking on and listening to their talk, but unable to make anything out. Matthew, who could speak Yiddish, tried speech with them by that means, and so fluently that the tavern-keeper looked at him in amazement. The Germans eyed him, but answered nothing. Gregory, the Voyt's brother, then said a few German words to them: at which, grunting among themselves as swine do over a trough, they turned their backs on the peasants.

Matthew took fire at this. "Let's punch their snouts for them!" he cried.

"Aye; or tickle their sides with a cudgel to make them speak."

And Adam Klemba, a fiery young fellow, exclaimed:

"I'll hit this nearest one in the stomach; and if he strikes back, ye all come in for fair play."

But they restrained him; and the Germans, probably guessing some harm was intended them, took with them a barrel of beer, and left the place.

"Hey, ye Long Trousers, do not hurry so: they might fall down by the way!"

And as they drove off, the peasants shouted after them:  
"Breed of swine!"

No sooner had they left than the Jew informed the peasants that the Germans had almost completed the purchase of Podlesie: fifteen families were to settle on that farm.

"And then we shall be hemmed in and squeezed to death on our poor strips of land, while they stretch and multiply over those broad acres!"

"Then let us bid higher and keep them out!" said Staho Ploshka to Gregory, who had spoken last. "Use your wits, since ye think yourself clever!"

"Blood of a dog!" Matthew shouted, thumping the bar with his fist; "'tis a ruinous business, this! If they settle down in Podlesie, 'twill be a hard thing for us to keep our homesteads in Lipka." Of this he was sure: he had been about the world, and knew what Germans were.

His hearers were at first incredulous. All the same, it troubled them, and they fell a-thinking: how could evil come to them in Lipka from neighbours in Podlesie?

Every day, herdsmen and wayfarers came to tell how the lands of Podlesie were being measured, and landmarks laid down, and wells dug. Of this, too, so many as wandered out of curiosity in the direction of Vola had ocular demonstration.

But what was the true situation of affairs? That as yet they had not ascertained.

They urged the smith to find out, for he had made friends with the Germans and shod their horses; but he fought shy, and either learned or told them nothing.

It was Gregory who at last sought information and got at the truth.

The fact was that the Squire owed a certain German fifteen thousand roubles, which he could not pay. The latter proposed taking Podlesie for the debt, and paying the difference in ready money. The Squire seemed inclined to agree to this, but secretly looked out for some other purchaser, the German offering only sixty roubles an acre.

"He will have to agree," Gregory declared. "The Manor



is swarming with Jews, all crying out for their money. And the forester told me the Manor cows had been attached for the taxes. How, then, can he pay them? Everything is sold! And he may not cut down the forest, so long as his lawsuit with us is not ended.—No, he must sell Podlesie at any price.”

“Why, such land is worth a hundred roubles an acre!”

“Then buy it at that price, and he will be only too glad to sell!”

“Alas, money is short! Whence is it to come?”

“So then, the Germans must get all, and we nothing!”

They talked on, with sad forebodings. How hard it was that such land should be lost to them—so near, so fruitful, so suitable for their sons and sons-in-law! They could have founded another village there, with fertile meadows and water in abundance. . . . But there, all was of no avail! The Germans were there, they would get the upper hand and crush the life out of the poor peasants.

“And whither shall all these go?” the old men murmured sadly, looking on while their children played about the roads in the evening—so numerous that the huts could scarce contain them. “But how is it possible to purchase any land, since we get barely enough to live on out of ours?”

They cudgelled their brains not a little; they even went to the priest for advice. But he could give them none. “Out of an empty pot, nothing is ever got!”

“Ah! ‘money makes the mare go’; but, ‘wherever the poor man goes, the wind against him blows!’”

Useless complaints, useless lamentations!

To make matters worse, the weather grew excessively hot: July weather in May. The sun rose in the very East, a vast fire in the azure: on every height, in all sandy soil, the vegetables drooped and faded. The grass was sear and burnt upon the fallows; and the potato-plants, which had at first sprouted well, hardly covered the ground with their poor puny shoots. The autumn-sown lands were alone to suffer little; being already in the ear, they grew splendidly

and very high: the low cottages they surrounded seemed to have shrunk yet lower, crouching earthwards with only their roofs well above the forest of waving corn.

The nights being so hot and sultry that it was painful to lie in the huts, people slept in the orchards.

As a consequence of the great heats, of those troubles which beset them in troops, and also of the hard times preceding the harvest (harder than usual that year), it came to pass that the people of Lipka quarrelled and fought among themselves more than ever. Everyone seemed to enjoy thwarting his neighbour, and life there became a real torment. From the peep of day, the village rang with bickerings and angry words, some new contest taking place every day. Now it was Kobus and his wife, who had such a set-to that the priest had to go and rebuke and reconcile them; now Balcerek's wife, who came to blows with Gulbas over a pig that had strayed into her carrot-patch; now Ploshkova, who had a row with the Soltys, on account of their goslings' getting mixed: besides countless wrangles about the children, or unneighbourly behaviour, or anything that could serve for a squabble and outcries and noisy invectives. There seemed to be a curse on the village, bringing no end of altercations, breaches of the peace, and law-suits.

Ambrose even made fun of this waspish disposition before strangers.

"This year times are not so very hard for me before harvest, by the goodness of Providence! No one dies, no one is born, no one is married; but they daily offer me vodka, and flatter me, and beg me to bear witness for them! Let them but wrangle so a few years more, and I shall have drunk myself to death!"

Lipka was in a bad way indeed; but things went worst of all at Dominikova's.

Simon had returned with the others, Andrew's leg was well now; they were not in sore straits as others were, and things ought to have gone on as of old. Far from it!



Her sons would no longer obey her. They were grown rebellious, always at loggerheads with her, objected to being beaten, and refused to do woman's work!

"Ye must hire a maidservant," they said tartly, "or do the work yourself."

Now Dominikova had ruled them with a rod of iron, and tyrannized over them for many a year; so she was very much shocked to see her own children rise up against her now.

"Grant me patience!" she would scream on such occasions, flying in a rage, and taking up her stick; but they made stout resistance, and were as stubborn as she. Every day there were fearful quarrels, hunts all over the premises, and so on, till the neighbours would rush in to smooth matters over.

The priest himself called her sons to him, and exhorted them to live in concord and obedience. They heard him out with patient respect, kissed his hand and humbly embraced his knees as in duty bound; but they behaved as before.

"We are no children; we know what to do, and Mother must yield. Why, the whole village was making laughing-stocks of us!"

Choler and exasperation had made the old dame yellow as a quince. Do what she might, she could not get the better of them; and now, instead of attending church services or gossiping as she had been accustomed, she had to work at home! She was always calling on Yagna to assist her; but from her too she got shame and sorrow in plenty.

The Voyt would look in frequently, to take her advice, he said: in reality, to get Yagna out with him, and play pranks with her in the garden.

Nothing can be hidden in a village: all knew perfectly well what was going on. And their guilty love becoming more and more openly scandalous, certain good people spoke several times to the old woman on the subject.

What was she to do? Yagna, notwithstanding prayers

and supplications, flaunted her wantonness as though to spite her mother. The most grievous sin, the most shameful obloquy, was preferable in her eyes to staying by that husband whom she loathed.

Hanka too did nothing to oppose this state of things, and said so openly.

"So long as there is no one to prevent the Voyt from wasting the community's money, she may do as she pleases. He grudges her naught, fetches her all he can from town, and would, if he could, put her in a frame of gold. Let them have their sport . . . and see the end of it!—I have naught in common with them!"

And truly, she had troubles enough of her own. She had given the lawyer whatever he asked, but could as yet not tell when Antek was to be tried, nor what destiny awaited him. And meanwhile he was pining away in prison, hoping God would have mercy on him.—In the cabin, besides, things went ill.

Pete had grown insolent of late—no doubt the smith had tampered with him; he did no more work than he chose. Once she had been in town: he had spent the whole day out of doors; and as she threatened to call him to account before Antek on his return:

"On his return?" was the jeering reply. "Bandits are never set free in such wise!"

The impertinent words made her blood boil, and she would have longed to strike him on the mouth; but what good would that have done? She had to pocket her affronts, till the right time should come. Otherwise, the man would leave, and all would be thrown on her hands. She could hardly manage to pull through as it was, and her health was breaking down under the strain. "Steel is devoured by rust, and rocks last but for a season"; how, then, could a feeble woman hold out for ever?

One day—May was then drawing to an end—the priest had driven off with the organist to a local festival. Ambrose had been drinking so deep with the Germans (who now



looked frequently in at the tavern) that he was not there to toll the evening Angelus, nor to open the church-door for the May service!

It was therefore decided to have the service in the burying-ground, where, close to the lich-gate, there stood a little shrine containing a statue of the Mother of God. Every May, the girls adorned it with paper ribbons and a gilt crown, and cast wild flowers all around, doing likewise all they could to preserve it from complete ruin. It was of great antiquity, and so cracked and crumbling and dilapidated that the birds no longer made their nests in it; and if a shepherd-boy ever took shelter there, it was only during the autumn rains. To some extent it was screened from the winter storms by the churchyard trees, the old lindens, some slender birches, and a few crosses which stood near, leaning out of the perpendicular.

A good many people had assembled, and quickly decked the shrine with flowers and verdure; and, having placed a taper and some small lamps at the feet of the statue, they knelt down piously.

The blacksmith bent in front before the threshold, sprinkled with tulips and eglantine blossoms; and he struck up a hymn.

It was then much after sunset, and growing dark; but the sky was still burning and golden in the West, with pale emerald higher up. All was very still; the long locks of the birches streamed down in cascades, and the corn stooped down, as though listening to the shrill quavering of the crickets.

The herds were wending their way home; and from field and village and pathways now unseen, there floated the graziers' noisy songs, mingled with long melancholy lowings. And the people looked into their Mother's face, and lifted up their voices, while she stretched her hands out in benediction over the world.

"Good night, O Lily white!  
Good night!"

The scent of the young birch-trees filled the air, and the nightingales began to try their notes, first in broken bursts, then gathering force, and finally breaking out into foaming streams of golden euphony—wonderful trills of long-drawn music, of melody dropping like pearls; while at no great distance resounded the violin of Mr. Yacek, which accompanied the human singers so sweetly, so gently, and so powerfully at once, it seemed that it came from the rye-stalks rustling against each other, or that the soil itself were breathing that chant of May.

All then sang together in ecstasies: the people, the birds, the violin; and when they paused to take breath awhile, an innumerable choir of frogs raised their husky voices all in tune and whirringly, as if hurrying them on to begin again.

So the chant went on—now these singers, now those.

The service lasted very long, and in the end the smith called out more than once to those behind him:

"Pray, do not drag the words so!" For many of them were lengthening out the notes beyond measure.

His remark to Matthias Klemba went even farther: "Don't bellow so; you're not following the oxen!" And at last they sang together all in harmony, and their voices were like a flock of doves soaring up in the dusky sky.

"Good night, O Lily white!

Good night!

Mary, our hearts' delight,

Good night!"

It was now black overhead, warm, and very quiet; but a few stars began to appear and sparkle and twinkle like dew-drops.

The girls in couples, arms about waists, sang together as they went home.

Hanka was returning alone, carrying her baby and absorbed in thought, when the smith approached and walked by her side.

She held her peace until close to her home; then, seeing him still beside her, she said:



"Are ye coming in, Michael?"

"Only into the porch," he answered in a low tone; "I have to speak with you."

She felt somewhat agitated. Had he any fresh misery in store for her?

"You have probably been to see Antek," he said.

"Yes, but was not let in."

"'Tis what I feared!"

"Say, then, what ye know!" She was shaking with apprehension.

"What I know? Only so much as I could get out of the police inspector."

"And what is that?" She pressed her little one closer.

"That Antek is not to be released until after the trial."

"How is that?" she stammered hoarsely. "The lawyer told me the contrary."

"'Tis because he would take to flight. In such cases, a prisoner is never set at liberty. Bear in mind that I come to you as a friend to-day.—Bygones are bygones. . . . Though you will see one day that I was right. . . . But hear what I have to say now: I am speaking the truth as in the confessional.—Antek is in a very sorry plight, and sure to be cruelly punished: perchance for ten years! You hear?"

"I do, and believe not one word," she said, with sudden self-control.

"Seeing is believing; and I have told you the truth."

"After your fashion," she replied, smiling ironically.

He seemed offended, and assured her warmly that he had come for no other purpose but to give her friendly advice. She listened as he talked, looking round impatiently; the cows lowed un milked in their byres, the geese were still out of doors, the colt and Lapa sporting in the enclosure, and the little ones playing in the barn: while of all he was telling her she believed nothing. "But I'll let him talk on," she thought, "till I find out what he's aiming at"; and she held herself on the alert.

"What is to be done?" she asked mechanically.

"There is something," he whispered.

She faced him suddenly.

"Pay down enough money, and he will be released even before the trial. And then he can escape. Even to 'Hamerica'! They will not catch him there."

"Lord! to 'Hamerica'!" she cried, appalled.

"Hush! I tell you in great secrecy. 'Tis what the Squire said to me. 'Let him get away,' he said; 'ten years of Siberia will ruin any man's life.' . . . That he told me but yesterday."

"What! and flee from our village . . . our children . . . our lands?" It was the only misfortune that appealed to her.

"Pay the sum wanted, and Antek will do all the rest.—Give it to them."

"But where—where am I to get it? . . . O my God! . . . Away to the very back of the world. . . . So far from everyone!"

"They ask for five hundred roubles. Why, ye have father-in-law's money: take it and pay; we shall reckon together later—only save Antek!"

She saw the trap, and started to her feet.

"Obstinate dog! Always on the same trail!" she said, about to leave him.

"This is foolishness!" he exclaimed, losing patience.

"'Twas but a word that escaped me. Must ye take offence at a word, when your man is rotting in jail?—Oh, he shall know how much ye do to set him free!"

She sat down again, quite bewildered.

He talked to her for some time about "Hamerica," and folk he knew that had gone there, who wrote letters home, and even sent their families money. Antek might get away at once; Michael knew a Jew who had wafted many a one over the frontier. Multitudes got away thus. Hanka, too, might follow later, without attracting attention. Gregory would return from the army, and repay all from the inheritance; or if he could not, a purchaser would readily be found.

"Take ye counsel of the priest," he concluded; "he will



approve my plan, as ye will see. I have only urged you to do right, and for no profit of my own.—But breathe not a word of this to anyone else, or the gendarmes will know of it. And then he would not get out of prison at all, and be perchance put in irons into the bargain," he concluded grimly.

"But where is the money to come from that will set him free?" she said, with a groan.

"I know a man in Modlitsa who would lend it—at high interest. Oh, the money can be found! I'll lay my life I could manage that!"

For a long while he went on counselling her, and at last slipped away abruptly. She, lost in thought, took no note of his going.

Everybody else had gone to bed, except Vitek, who seemed to be waiting for his mistress. The moon went up through the heavens, a silver reaping-hook moving athwart the deep expanse. Over the meadows crept white sheets of mist; above the rye was hanging the dust of its saffron pollen; moveless as an ice-field, the mill-pond glittered amongst the trees. Broken by the nightingales' rills of bubbling music, the silence made the ears ring and tingle.

"Heavens! To flee one's village, and one's land—and all!" she thought, the same idea ever returning; and her dread grew more intense, and she felt her trembling heart shrink in the clutch of pain.

Lapa then howled aloud; the birds sang no more, and the gales whistled and moaned among the dark shadows of the branches.

"Lapa now sees Kuba's ghost!" Vitek muttered, and crossed himself with awe.

"Foolish one! go to bed!" said Hanka.

"But indeed he does come, and looks after the horses, and brings them their fodder. Aye, and not once only!"

She took no notice of his words. All was now plunged in deep stillness; and there she sat, repeating, as one paralysed with appalling anguish: "To flee a whole world away!—And for ever, merciful Jesus!—For ever!"

## CHAPTER IX

THE green Whitsuntide boughs, decorating the cabin-doors, had not yet quite withered, when one morning Roch dropped most unexpectedly into the village.

It was only after hearing Mass, however, and having a long talk with the priest, that he went round to the village. There were but few people about, most of them being occupied tumping their potato-plants; but when, with its usual speed, the news had gone about, a good many hastened to bid him welcome after his long absence.

He came, according to his wont, slowly, leaning on his staff, but with head erect, and wearing the same grey capote and the same rosary about his neck. The wind blew his grey hair loose, but his thin features were gleaming with kindness and geniality.

He gazed around him, smiling gladly upon all he saw, with a special greeting for everybody; patting the little ones' heads, and accosting the women with great pleasure to find everything in its former state.

When they inquired curiously of him where he had been so long, "In Chenstohova, to gain the indulgences," he replied.

Glad to see him back, they at once set to telling him all the village news: asking advice, complaining of their neighbours, and all wishful to explain their troubles to him in private.

He was extremely tired, he told them; they must wait: he would be staying in Lipka a day or two.

At that they all begged him to stay with them. But he said he was engaged for the beginning by his promise to Hanka; after, if anyone would take him, he might stay longer. And so he made for Boryna's.

Hanka of course was overjoyed to receive him. No



sooner had he laid down his staff and wallet than he went over to the old man.

"Ye will find him lying in the orchard: it is too hot in the room.—Meanwhile we are boiling some milk for you . . . and eggs too, if you care."

Roch was at once in the orchard, bending under the drooping branches, as he made his way to the patient, who lay in a basketwork contrivance, covered over with a sheep-skin coat. Lapa, curled up at his feet, watched over him; and Vitek's stork was strutting bravely about amongst the trees, as if on guard.

In this old leafy orchard, the well-grown trees kept the sun out so completely that only a few spots of light, like golden spinners, moved about on the grass beneath.

Matthias lay upon his back. The boughs waved their dark mantle over his head, murmuring softly, and only now and then, when tossed by the winds, letting a patch of blue sky peep through, and a sunbeam fall on his face.

Roch sat down by his side. The patient at once turned to him.

"Ah! Matthias, don't you know me? don't you know me?"

A slight smile passed over Boryna's face, his eyelids fluttered, and his ashen lips moved; but no sound came from them.

"If it be our Lord's will, ye may yet recover."

This he must have understood, for he shook his head, and—unconsciously, it seemed—turned his face away, to look at the tossing boughs, and the bright rays that from time to time shone into his eyes.

Roch sighed, made the sign of the cross over him, and went back.

"Well," Hanka inquired, "is not Father better now?"

He pondered some time; then replied, in low grave tones:

"A lamp always flickers more brightly just before going out. Belike Matthias is passing away. For my part, I wonder he has held out so long."

"He eats naught: often will he not even take milk."

"Ye should be ready for the end any day."

"We should indeed.—Ambrose told me so only the other day, and advised me not to delay having a coffin made."

"Ye may," he answered mournfully; "'twill not be empty very long.—The soul that is panting to leave this world nothing can keep back, not even our tears. Else some should remain with us for centuries." And, supping the milk she had prepared for him, he asked her about things in the village.

What she told him he had learned on his way to her; but she afterwards dilated at length and eagerly on her own troubles.

"Where is Yuzka?"

"In the fields, tumping our potatoes along with the *Komor-niki* and Yagustynka. Pete is off to the forest, fetching Staho timber for a new hut."

"What, is he building one?"

"Aye. Mr. Yacek has given him ten trunks of pinewood."

"Given him? I heard something of that sort, but could not believe it."

"For it is incredible! No one would credit the thing at first. The man had promised; but that anyone can do. 'Promises are toys made to give fools joys,' as the saying is. —Well, Mr. Yacek gave Staho a letter he was to carry to the Squire. Even Veronka said no to that: why should he wear his boots out for nothing, and be laughed at into the bargain for believing a Squire? But he would have his own way. And when he had given in the letter (he told us) the Squire called him into his room, offered him vodka, and said: 'Bring ye wagons, and the forester shall mark out ten logs for you.' Klemba and the Soltys gave him wagons, and I gave him Pete besides. The Squire was actually in the clearing, waiting for him, and himself chose ten of the straightest and longest of all, that had been hewn down in winter for the Jews! And now Staho is setting up a beautiful cabin.—No need to say how or with what excuses he thanked Mr. Yacek; whom indeed we all held for a pauper and a lackbrain, forasmuch as no one can tell what his



means are, and he plays the fiddle under the holy figures or in the corn, and sometimes talks in rambling wise, and as one not in his right wits.—Yet is he such a big man that the very Squire does his bidding. Who could have believed such a thing?"

"Look not upon the man, but on his deeds."

"But to give such a quantity of timber, worth (Matthew says) a thousand *zloty* at least, and all just for a Thank-you-kindly! Why, it is unheard of!"

"They say he intends to take over the old cabin, to live in for the rest of his life."

"Absurd! it has the worth of a split wooden clog: no more.—Folk were so suspicious of something underhanded that Veronka went to ask his Reverence about the whole business; who scolded her, and called her a silly woman."

"So she was.—Take what is given you, thanking God for His goodness."

"Aye, but to get aught for naught is so monstrous a thing: and out of a Squire besides! So unheard of! Did anyone ever give a peasant anything at all for love? When we want the simplest advice, they look to see what our hands offer. Just accost an official empty-handed: how surely he'll tell you: 'To-morrow,' or 'Come next Sunday'! Oh, Antek's business has taught me how things are done, and I have spent not a little that way already."

"'Tis well ye put me in mind of Antek.—I have been in town."

"And seen him?"

"No time for that."

"I too went not long ago, but did not see him. God knows when I shall."

He smiled. "Sooner perchance than ye think."

"Good Lord! what is it ye say?"

"The truth. I have been told at head-quarters that Antek may be released before the trial. But someone must stand bail for him to the amount of five hundred roubles."

"The very sum the smith spoke of!" And she told him Michael's advice, word for word.

"There is something in it; but, coming from him, 'tis unsafe! He surely has only his own gain in view.—Be not hasty to sell: 'A man rides away from his lands on a stallion, but on foot he comes back—a tatterdemallion.'—Would anybody stand bail? We must seek someone.—If the money were but at hand!"

"Perhaps it is," she said timidly. "I—I have a little cash in hand, but cannot count it aright."

"Show it me; we shall do the sum together."

She disappeared, and soon returned, shot the bolt, and laid a parcel on his knees.

It contained notes, some silver and some gold pieces, besides six strings of corals.

"These belonged to his dead wife. He gave them to Yagna, and (I suppose) took them back again later," she whispered, squatted down by the settle on which Roch was counting.

"Four hundred and thirty-two roubles, five *zloty*.—From Matthias, hey?"

"Yes—yes!" she faltered, turning red. "He gave them to me after Eastertide."

"It will not suffice entirely, but you might dispose of some of the animals."

"It might be done. Our sow could go . . . and the barren cow likewise. The Jew asked to buy her; she might still be worth some bushels of corn to us."

"Then we shall bail Antek without aid.—Is it known to anyone that ye have this money?"

"Father gave it to me to set Antek free, forbidding me to say one word of it to any creature. You are the first to know.—If Michael . . . !"

"Be easy; your secret is safe. When I hear the time has come, we shall go together and free Antek. The clouds will roll by and the weather clear up, my dear child!" he said, and kissed the top of her head, as she fell at his feet to thank him.

She wept tears of joy. "My own father could not have been fonder," she sobbed.



"Your man will return to you, thank God!—Where is Yagna?"

"She started for town this morning in company with her mother and the Voyt. They say Dominikova is going to the notary, intending to make all her land over to Yagna."

"All to Yagna?—And her sons?"

"They want her to divide the land, and she would spite them. Hell is in their cabin now, and the Voyt is on Dominikova's side: at the father's death, he was named the orphans' guardian."

"Is it so? About the Voyt I had heard another tale."

"Ye have heard true. He does indeed care for Yagna, but in such wise as I shame to speak of. He is past his prime, but still vigorous; and she, a wanton. I do not repeat hearsay; myself I saw them in the orchard."

"I would lay me down somewhere: may I?"

She wanted him to sleep on Yuzka's bed, but he preferred going to the stable.

"Keep your money safe!" he said on leaving her.

He was not seen until dinner-time. After the meal, he was making for the village, when Hanka hesitatingly proffered a request.

"Roch, would you help us to adorn our altar?"

"Ah! yes: to-morrow is Corpus Christi Day.—Where are you to erect it?"

"Where we do every year: outside our porch. I am sending Peter instantly to the forest for young fir-trees and pine-bough decorations, whilst Yagustynka is to hurry off with Yuzka and get flowers for garlands."

"And have ye the tapers and candlesticks yet?"

"Only this morning, Ambrose promised to bring me some from the church."

"And on whose premises are altars to be set up besides?"

"At the Voyt's, on this side of the pond; on the other, at the miller's and at Ploshka's."

"I shall help: but first I must see Mr. Yacek. Ere dusk, I am here again."

"Then pray tell Veronka to come over by daybreak tomorrow, and make herself useful."

He nodded, and walked away towards the ruins of Staho's hovel.

Mr. Yacek was, as usual, on the threshold, smoking, stroking his beard, and looking far away to where the birds fluttered above the undulating corn.

In front of the hut, close to the cherry-trees, lay several enormous trunks; ancient Bylitsa went pottering among them, now dealing a blow at them with an ax, now smoothing away some protruding knag with a hatchet, and talking to them all the time aloud:

"Aha! So you have come into our yard. Many thanks! Matthew will soon cut you asunder into shapely beams that shall do you no little honour. Aye, you shall dwell here secure from moisture: fear not."

"He talks to it as though it were a living thing!" Roch observed in some surprise.

"Sit ye down: he is mad with joy to-day.—Hark to him!"

"And you too, poor sufferer, lived in the forest; now will you rest, and none shall come to trouble you any more!" continued the old man, patting the resin-stained bark with loving hands.

Then, stepping over to the largest trunk, that had been flung down by the roadside, and crouching close to the flat sawn resin-sweltering surface with yellow rings that he gloated fondly upon, he muttered:

"So great a one? yet overcome all the same, hey? The Jews would fain have carried you to town, but through our Lord's grace you remain here with your own, your husbandmen: they will hang sacred images upon you, and the priest will bless you with holy water. Aye, Aye!"

At this, Mr. Yacek smiled faintly, and, having spoken a few words with Roch, took up his violin, and made for the forest by the field-paths.

Roch stayed listening to Veronka as she talked, and evening slowly came on.



The morrow being a festival, the day's work was sooner ended than usual. Women began to weave festoons outside the cabins, children came in, bringing armfuls of green flags and rushes. In front of Ploshka's and the miller's houses, birch and fir-boughs were piled in heaps, to be planted wherever an altar was raised; and the girls decked the walls behind them with greenery. They also filled up many hollow places in the roads with gravel and sand.

Roch, who had left Veronka, was just emerging on the poplar road, when someone on horseback appeared, galloping at breakneck speed in a cloud of dust. The carts that carried Staho's timber impeded him and he tried to pass round them by the field.

"If ye haste so, you will founder your horse," they cried in vain. He went by them, and galloped on, till the horse was panting and blown.

"Adam!" Roch exclaimed; "wait a minute!"

Young Klemba just stopped long enough to roar:

"Know that two people lie murdered in the forest. O Lord! how frightened I am! I had been just by, tending the horses, and was coming home with the lad Gulbas, when—just at Boryna's cross—my horse shied. I looked and saw two people lying in the juniper-bushes. I called out to them; but they made no more answer than if dead."

"O fool, what fable are you telling us now?" his hearers cried.

"Then go look yourselves: there they lie! Gulbas saw them as well, but he ran away to the *Komorniki*."

"Good God!—Then make haste to the Voyt and tell him."

"He is not yet back from town," someone said.

"Then to the Soltys! He is near the blacksmith's, mending the road with other workmen," they called after him as he clattered away.

The news of the murder had flashed round the village, and people were crossing themselves with fear. Someone informed his Reverence, who came out to ask about it; and all most impatiently awaited the return of the Soltys, who at once had gone in a cart, with Klemba and some labourers.

They waited for ever so long. It was growing dusk when he came back, and—to everybody's amazement—along with the Voyt's horse and britzka; in a very ferocious humour too, cursing, slashing at his poor jade, and doing his best to pass through the crowd. But someone seized the bridle; and, forced to stop, he cried:

"Those mischievous boys! they have been trying a practical joke. There was no one slain: only some people asleep in the bushes. Oh, let me but catch that young Klemba, he shall pay for the fright given—and that soundly!—So I met the Voyt and brought him home with me . . . and that's all!—Vee—o! Little One!"

"But," one man remarked, looking into the open cart, "what ails the Voyt? He is sprawling there like a sick man!"

"He's asleep, that's all!" And the Soltys whipped the horses into a trot.

"What mischievous rascals! To make up such a story!"

"It's all young Gulbas' doing: he is always the first in such games!"

"Rub them both down with an oaken towel! Teach them to scare folk for nothing!"

Very indignant over the whole affair, they were going home, when on their way they met the *Komorniki*, with heavy faggots on their backs, and Kozlova marching at their head, though nearly bent double with her load. Seeing them, she leant back, and remained propped up by her burden.

"He has duped you finely, has the Soltys!" she sneered, almost speechless with fatigue. "Ha! No dead men indeed were in the forest, but worse perchance."

A large group was soon attracted by her words; and then she burst forth with her tale.

"I was going back to the cross by the forest-path, when Gulbas, scared to death, came running to me, telling of dead folk that lay in the juniper-bushes hard by. I thought it were well to look at them, at any rate. We went, and I saw from afar two people lying as dead. Filipka pulled my



sleeve to drag me away, and Gregory's wife was pattering her prayers, and I too felt creepy all over. . . . But I crossed myself, went up to them, and looked—and what do I see? My lord the Voyt, lying, with his coat off, and beside him Yagna Borynova: both sleeping very deep. . . . And how they reeked of vodka! . . . And she, unclad in such guise that I shame to say. . . . It was as bad as Sodom! I am old, but such a scandal I never yet heard of.—So the Soltys came up, and Yagna ran off; but his Lordship the Voyt was hard to get into the cart.—Drunk as a pig!"

A voice was heard: "Merciful Lord! this is a new thing in Lipka!"

"If it had been only a farm-hand with a wench!—But a husbandman, a father, and our Voyt!"

"Boryna lies close to death, with no one to give him to drink; and she! . . ."

"I would escort her with tapers out of the place, the harlot! Nay, I'd beat her with rods before the church!" Kozlova shouted once more.

"And where is Dominikova?"

"They left her in town; she was in their way."

"Oh, the sin, the scandal of it! And the shame extends to us all."

"That Yagna—so careless of honour—ready to do the same again to-morrow!"

In their huts, they went on complaining, full of horror and indignation, some of the kinder-hearted women also weeping, in fear of God's judgment upon all of them; and all the village was full of talk and lamentation.

Some young fellows took Gulbas aside to question him about particulars.

"A famous fellow with women, that Voyt of ours," said Adam Vahnik.

"He'll have to pay for this: his wife will tear his hair out!"

"And hold aloof from him for six months."

"Oh, he will not care so much for that now!"

"Yes, one might do any folly for such a lass as Yagna!"

"Surely. Among the Manor damsels, none more fair than she, and when she but looks at any man, she sends a thrill through him!"

"So honey-sweet!—No wonder if Antek Boryna . . ."

"Hold your tongues, men! Gulbas is a liar; so is Kozlova: all this they say out of spite, and we do not know the truth as yet," Matthew interfered, in tones of great concern; but he was interrupted by Gregory the Voyt's brother's arrival.

"Well? Is Peter still asleep?" they asked him. He answered:

"That man was my own brother; but after what he has done, he's no more to me than a dog!—But," he added with a burst of fury, "that carrion is the cause of all!"

"'Tis a lie!" vociferated Pete, the farm-servant at Boryna's, pushing forward towards Gregory; "and he that utters it is a yelping cur!"

They all were amazed at this unexpected explosion; and he went on, with clenched trembling fists:

"No one is guilty but the Voyt. Was it she gave him corals? or enticed him to the tavern? or lurked for him in the orchard all night long? How he tempted her, how he forced her on! Oh, I know too well! He may even have drugged her: do I know?"

"You plague-spotted protector of hers, be still, or your girdle may come off!"

"But she'll know how you've stood up for her . . . and reward you well!"

"Peradventure with a pair of breeches Matthias wears no more!"

They jeered and laughed till they nearly burst their sides.

"Since her goodman cannot speak for her, I who can will. Aye, I will, blood of a dog! . . . Let me but hear another word against her! O you loud-mouthed curs, how silent you'd have been had she been your sister or your wife!"

"Now then, hold your peace, you stable-boy!" Staho Ploshka thundered. "What right have you to meddle here? Meddle with your horses' tails!"



"And beware," Vahnik added, "lest you get more than this rebuke!"

"And leave farmers alone, you filthy matted-pate!" was the shout they sent up as they withdrew.

"O you scurvy bumpkins!—A stable-boy I am, yes; but never at least did I take a measure of corn in secret to the Jew! Ye know me not!" he called after the retiring group; and they, feeling somehow small and mean, answered nothing, but went home.

The weather was strange that evening: windy, but very bright. Long after sundown there yawned huge gulfs of blood-red fire far up in the depths of the sky. There prevailed a feeling of unrest; the gale howled aloud, but so high above that it only tore at the lofty tree-tops. Geese, no one knew why, would fall a-clamouring in the enclosures all together; dogs ran about nervously, even beyond their homes. No one remained in the house or sat on the door-steps; all gathered at some distance from the dwelling, and talked with their neighbours in low voices.

Hanka had with her a few friends, who had come to condole, and learn something more about Yagna. But when they came to the subject, she answered them scornfully:

"'Tis a shame and a sin, but an affliction too!"

"Certainly; and the whole parish will know all to-morrow!"

"And will say we are the worst village of all."

"And the shame will fall upon all the Lipka women."

"Because they all are so good that, driven like Yagna, they all would do the same!" Yagustynka said, mocking.

"Be silent! 'tis not the time for jeering now!" snapped Hanka, with such stern rebuke that she uttered not another word.

Hanka was still half choked with shame; but the anger which at first surged up within her had now passed away. And when her friends had gone home, she looked in at the other side, ostensibly to see to Matthias. Perceiving Yagna lying asleep in her clothes, she bolted the door and undressed her carefully in the dark.

"May God have pity on such a fate as hers!" was the thought which came to her a little after, flooding her with immense compassion.

Yagustynka must have noted this change of attitude; for she said, though reluctantly:

"Yagna is not guiltless, but the Voyt is still more to blame."

"True; and it is he—he!—that ought to be punished for everything," Hanka returned, in such energetic agreement that Pete cast a look of gratitude towards her.

They had gauged the common feeling. Till late in the night Ploshka and the Koziols were going about the village, stirring people up against the Voyt. The former would enter the huts and say, as in jest:

"Well, well, we have got a splendid Voyt: the most strapping fellow in all the district!"

And, finding them slow to follow his drift, he would take them with him to the tavern, where some of the smaller farmers were gathered already; plied them assiduously with vodka, and returned to the attack when he saw them flushed.

"Our Voyt is great for doing things, hey?"

"And not for the first time either," Kobus replied, cautiously.

"I know about him . . . I know . . . I know . . . what I'll not tell," growled Sikora, who was tipsy, and leaned heavily against the bar.

"And about you too, I know . . . I know . . . what I'll not tell," he went on growling.

"The only thing," said Ploshka, ordering glasses round again, "is to depose him. Whom we have made Voyt, we can unmake. What he has just done shames all the village; but he has done worse. He has always held with the Squire, to the hurt of our community. He would have had a school opened in Lipka;<sup>1</sup> and 'twas he no doubt who recommended the Voyt to sell Podlesie to the Germans. He revels and drinks continually; he has built a barn and purchased a horse; weekly he eats flesh-meat; and he drinks

<sup>1</sup>A Russian Government school, that is.—*Translator's Note.*



tea!—At whose expense, pray? Not at his own, belike!”

“I know,” Sikora growled, interrupting, “that the Voyt is a swine, but also that in this trough you would fain put your snout too!”

“The man’s drunk and talking nonsense!”

“And likewise do I know that you shall never be Voyt!”

Thereupon they went apart from him, and took counsel far into the night.

On the morrow the Voyt’s adventure was talked about yet more loudly, for the priest had forbidden the altar which had been in former years erected before his cabin. Early in the morning, he had sent for Dominikova, who had not come home till midnight the day before; and he was so angry that he even chid the organist, and gave Ambrose a beating with his long pipe-stem!

Corpus Christi, like the former days, rose serene and splendid, but remarkably sultry and still. Ever since dawn, the sun had been blazing pitilessly; the air was so parched that all the leaves drooped; the corn bowed earthward, faint and limp; the sand burned the bare feet like hot embers, and great drops of resin came trickling out of the walls.

This heat was really a visitation, but the people troubled little about it, plunged as they were in their preparations for the service. The girls appointed to bear the feretories and shrines and pictures in the procession ran like mad from cabin to cabin to try on their robes and comb their hair, while their elders were adorning the altars as fast as they could—at the miller’s, outside the priest’s (instead of at the Voyt’s), and before Boryna’s cabin, where Hanka with her household had been working hard ever since the peep of day.

They were also the first to have done the work, and so artistically that everyone admired it even more than the miller’s altar.

It was indeed finer. In front of the porch there stood a sort of little chapel, made of interwoven birch-boughs, covered with pieces of woollen cloth, striped in many a hue; whilst inside, on a platform, rose an altar with white

napery and fine linen, embellished with tapers and flowers in pots, to which Yuzka had stuck various patterns in gilt paper to adorn them.

There hung above the altar a large-sized painting of our Lady, and several smaller ones on either side. To enhance the effect of the whole, they had suspended over the altar a cage containing a blackbird that Nastka had brought.

From the very gate a lane had been made of fir-branches, alternating with birch-boughs, planted and neatly tumped with yellow sand; and the sanded path had been sprinkled over with sedges.

Yuzka had brought whole armfuls of cornflowers, larkspurs and field vetches, with which she wreathed images, candlesticks, and whatever else could be wreathed, even strewing flowers all over the ground before the altar. The cabin too came in for its share: walls and windows were drowned in verdure, and waving sedges stuck all along the top of the roof.

Everybody was hard at work, except Yagna alone, who early in the morning had slipped out of the hut, and was not seen any more that day.

So they were the first to be ready, but not before the sun shone well over the village, and the clatter of the carts coming in from the other hamlets began to increase.

Very hurriedly they made ready for church.

Vitek alone was to remain in the enclosure; for swarms of children came pressing in to admire the altar and whistle to the blackbird. He tried to keep them at a distance with a bough, but it would not do. So he loosed his stork, that came on stealthily, prodding and thrusting at their bare legs with its sharp beak, and made them disperse with screams.

They started all together, just as the Mass-bell began to tinkle. Yuzka went in front, dressed all in white, book in hand, and with bows of bright red to her shoes.

"What do you think of this, Vitek?" she had asked, spinning on her heel before him.



"You're as fair to see as the whitest goose!" he answered in admiration.

"Your boot knows as much about it as you do! But Hanka says no one in all the village is clad so well," she said, stamping and pulling down her short skirt.

"Your red knees can be seen through the skirt, as the flesh of a goose through the feathers!"

"Silly lad!—But," she added, in a warning whisper, "hide your stork away! The priest will come with the procession, and might see and know it again."

"Oh, but how fine the mistress looks! For all the world like a turkey-cock!" he murmured in ecstasy, gazing after them down the road; and then, mindful of Yuzka's warning, he shut the stork up in the potato-pit, and let out Lapa to watch before the altar: after which he betook himself to Matthias, lying as usual in the orchard.

The village was deserted. In the church, the service had commenced. The priest came out for Mass, the organ pealed; and, the sermon ended, all the bells were set ringing till they frightened the doves off the roofs. Then the people poured out, streaming through the great door, with banners dipping forward, tapers flaming, holy pictures borne by white-clad maidens, and, at last, the red canopy over the priest, who bore the golden Monstrance.

They formed in procession, with a long lane, edged with flickering lights, cut through the dense throng; and his Reverence intoned:

"Lo, at Thy gate I stand, O Lord!"

to which all the multitude answered, thundering in unison—one great Heaven-reaching voice!—

"My soul hath waited on Thy word."

Singing, they moved forward, with a great crush about the narrow lich-gate; for the concourse was immense, consisting of the whole parish. All the folk of all the Manors were present: several Squires supported the priest on either side, or walked close by, taper in hand. The canopy was borne

aloft by husbandmen of the parish: only (perhaps on account of the recent disgrace) none of them men of Lipka.

From the churchyard shadows to the open space beyond, white, dazzling, broiling hot, where the burning sun made the eyes to blink with its living fires, on they walked to the sound of the whole tolling belfry. The chants rose up, the incense-smoke soared forth along with clouds of dust; lights scintillated, and bright showers of flowery petals fell continually, scattered at the feet of his Reverence.

The crowd surged along, heavy-footed, chanting mightily, like to a noisy many-coloured stream; and in its midst—a boat in the rapid current, as it were—floated the crimson canopy. And the holy banners waved and tossed beside the pictures and statues of saints, veiled in gauze and gay with flowers.

Onwards they moved, dense, serried, squeezed, heads close to heads, and each one singing for all he was worth—each as if the whole world sang with him the glory of the Lord—as if those tall lime-trees, those dark alders, those waters sparkling in light, those tapering birches, those lowly orchards and green fields and vague distances beyond human ken—all and everything—were adding to the hymn their hearty and joyful accompaniment; and the notes rolled and flew through the heat-laden air, up to the radiant sky, up to the sun!

That choral song stirred the very leaves upon the trees, and brought the last blossom-petals floating down!

The priest read the first Gospel at Boryna's altar, and, after a short rest, went forward to the miller's.

It was now still hotter than before, and fast growing unbearably hot. Every throat was dry as dust; a whitish haze had come over the sun; athwart the bright sky long filmy streaks were floating; the overheated air made the outlines of things quiver and wave as though seen through boiling water.—A storm was at hand.

The procession had lasted a full hour; the priest was drenched with perspiration and as red as a beetroot: yet



he continued to officiate with grave dignity, going from altar to altar, listening to the various Gospels sung and intoning the various hymns.

There were moments when the people ceased from chanting; and then the larks took up the song, and the continual cry, Cuckoo, Cuckoo! rang out. Meanwhile, and never-endingly, the great bells boomed.

And though the chants recommenced, and the peasants roared with stentorian throats, and the women's thin shrill voices joined in with the pipings of the children, and the rippling music of the tiny jingling bells carried in the procession, and the loud footsteps upon the trampled earth: still the voice of that grand tolling was loud all the time—pure, high—with deep golden notes that reached to Heaven, full of joy and gladness and sonorous beauty: as if hammers, beating on the sounding disk of the sun, were striking out of it those mighty notes, making the whole country-side toss and ring again!

Then came the return to the church, and a long service within doors: organ pealing loud, voices lifted up!

At last the congregation dispersed: when on a sudden the sky grew dark, the rolling of thunder resounded afar, a dry blasting wind came in whirling gusts, the trees lashed each other, and volumes of dust filled the air.

The people from the neighbouring villages drove away at once and at the top of their speed. A drizzling rain fell, making the air still more close and sultry, while the sun went on pouring down its pitiless heat. The frogs' croaking grew fainter and more drowsy to the ear. The gloom came nearer, and the far-off landscape was now already shrouded; the thunder growled again, and from the livid East brief pallid lightnings flashed forth.

It was from the East that the storm came, extending crescent-wise its ponderous masses of slate-blue clouds, pregnant with rain—possibly with hail. It whistled in the tree-tops, it tore along the corn, while the birds flew with noisy cries to the shelter of the eaves, and even the dogs

sought the cabins. The cattle, too, were coming back from the fields; whirls and pillars of dust were dancing along the roads, and closer and closer still came the sound of the thunder.

Presently the sun was submerged in a mass of rusty-hued vapour, through which it shone as through a pane of semi-transparent glass. The thunder growled close to the village, and such gusts came now and then as might have torn the trees up by the roots. The first thunderbolts struck somewhere far away in the woods; the whole sky quickly became of a dark livid tint; the sun vanished. Gusts flew raging by; bolts fell in quick succession; the earth shook with thunder, and the black sky shone brilliantly with flashes whose sudden glint plucked the eyes out.

The very dwellings quivered to the sounds, and all creation quailed and shrank with fear.

Luckily, however, the storm passed over on one side. The lightning struck somewhere far away, the wind went down, having done no harm, the sky brightened up again, after a plentiful rain had fallen a little before Vespers, bringing with it such a flood of water that all the corn was laid instantly, the mill-stream ran in spate, and every ditch, field-path and furrow was flowing with foaming water.

It was only at evening that all was as before, the rain having given over, and the sun shining forth behind the western clouds—a huge bright-red ball.

Then did Lipka breathe once more, its inhabitants looked out upon the world again, gratefully inhaling the cool air and the scents of the land after the rain, especially those of the young birches and the mint-plants in the gardens. The pools all along the roads burned in the sunset, the leaves and grasses sparkled, and the frothy waters seemed liquid fire, as they bubbled with joy, streaming down to the mill-pond.

A slight breeze rustled the laid corn; a bracing cool now breathed from the woods and fields. The children, shout-



ing merrily, went out to paddle in the brooks and ditches; birds chirruped in the boughs, dogs scampered about; the metallic notes of the priest's guinea-hens sounded from the hedge: in all the roads and all about the huts there was a din of talk and merry calls. Soon, too, not far from the mill, rose the sounds of the love-ditty:

"Long, long waiting, I am drenched with dew:  
Loved one, loved one, take me in to you!"

And from the fields, together with the bellowing of the cattle driven homewards, there floated a song bawled by some herdsman:

"Sweetheart, your rye once reaped, you said  
That me without delay you'd wed:  
Rye, wheat and oats are reaped; and yet  
My marriage lines I cannot get!  
Oy dana, da dana!"

Now the carts of those who had stayed out the storm began to drive off; but a good many farmers from the neighbouring places remained as the guests of the Lipka folk—those, that is, who had so kindly come to help the women not long since. They were received in the homes of the wealthier farmers with plenty to eat and drink; but the poorer took their kind friends to treat them at the tavern, so as to enjoy the pleasure of company: the more, the merrier.

Some musicians came too; and, immediately after Vespers, there was heard inside the tavern the thin melody of the violin, the rumbling of the bass-viol, and the deep-toned boom of the drum.

People crowded all the more eagerly to enjoy themselves, because since Easter there had been no occasion for merry-making.

So many had gathered together that there was not room for all, and quite a crowd had to be satisfied with the logs that lay outside the tavern; but as the weather was now fine, with a grand display of gold in the sky, they sat down there in numbers, and called for drink.

The tavern itself was brimful of young people, and they at once set to dancing the *Oberek*, making walls and floors groan with their impact and tread as they whirled along. And who led the dance with Nastka?—who but Simon, son of Dominikova? In vain did his brother Andrew dissuade him, plucking him by the sleeve; he was in a gay unruly mood, and drank vodka, and pressed it on Nastka and his boon companions, and flung five-kopek pieces to the band, that they might play with more spirit. And he took Nastka round the waist, vociferating with might and main: "Come, boys, be lively! Stamp and tramp as Poles do!"

And he galloped about the room like a runaway colt, shouting and striking the floor with great violence.

"He has no straw in his boots, that young blade!" Ambrose muttered, his throat twitching greedily, as he looked on at the drinkers. "As a flail, so wields he his limbs! . . . I hope they may not come off!" he added louder, and coming near.

"Take care lest one of yours come off!" Matthew retorted grimly, alluding to the other's wooden leg.

"Oh, I wish so much to drink friendship with you!" he answered, with a propitiatory smile.

"Here, drunkard! and have a care to leave the glass unswallowed!" Matthew replied, pouring out a full glass, and turning his back. Gregory, the Voyt's brother, was holding forth to his group in low tones; they listened, crowded up against the bar, and with such attention that they neither noted the dancers around nor the vodka that stood before them. They were six, all of the best families in the place, and very keen on the matter under discussion; but as the noise and the crowd increased, they presently passed into the Jew's private parlours, which he occupied along with his guests.

It was a small place indeed, so crammed with the beds of the Jewish brats that it was hard to find room at the table. A single tallow candle, stuck in a brass chandelier that hung from the rafters, burned with a smoky flame.



Gregory passed the bottle twice, and they drank, but no one referred to the talk they had broken off, till Matthew cried tartly:

"Now, Gregory, let's hear you: we all sit here like crows expecting rain!"

But before the latter could begin, the blacksmith entered, greeted them, and looked around for a seat.

"Pah! Here comes Sooty-Face, always springing up where he has not been sown!" Matthew blurted out; but, stifling his annoyance, he at once added: "Michael, here's to you!"

The smith tossed the liquor off and, trying to put a good face on the matter, remarked as if in jest: "I care not to learn the secrets of other folk, and perhaps I am not wanted here?"

"As you say!" Ploshka returned. "Being so friendly with the Germans—eating bacon on Friday and drinking coffee with them—would you not rather be still with them on a holiday like this?"

"You speak as one of the drunkards speaks!"

"I say but what all men know: you are ever in converse with them."

"I work for them that give me work: I do not pick and choose."

"Work!" hinted Vahnik; "there's more than work between them and you!"

"Of such work," Prychek added significantly, "as you did with the Squire and our forest."

"Oho! It seems I have met my judges here!—Much ye all know of the affair!"

"Let him be," said Gregory, staring sternly into the smith's shifty eyes. "He is free to do his business by himself . . . as we too to do ours by ourselves."

"Should a gendarme look through the window here," said the smith with a poor attempt at mockery, while his lips were twitching with rage, "he would take you for conspirators."

"And perchance we are, but not against you, Michael: you're not worth it."

At that he pulled his cap on, and made his exit, slamming the door.

"He scented something in the wind, and came here to find out all about it."

"He might even play the eavesdropper outside."

"Let him: he will hear something about himself that he will not like!"

"Now hark to me, boys!" Gregory said, gravely. "As I told you, the Germans have not purchased Podlesie yet, but the deed of sale may be signed any day. They talk of next Thursday."

"That we know: the question is, what's to be done!" Matthew cried impatiently.

"Advise us, Gregory, you who can, who are book-learned and read the papers."

"You see, if the Germans buy it and settle next to us, it will be like Gorka over again: we shall not have room to breathe in Lipka."

"Our fathers sigh, and scratch their heads, and cannot make out what to do."

"Yet they will not give up their farms to us!" several voices exclaimed at once.

"The Germans, what are they?" cried another. "Some settled in Lishka, and our peasants bought them out to the last acre.—True, in Gorka it was the other way round, but by our own fault: we drank, we went to law continually, and we all went a-begging in the end."

"Why, then, we too may buy Podlesie later!" said Yendrek Boryna, Antek's cousin.

"Tis easy to talk. At present, we cannot manage to pay so much as sixty roubles an acre: how shall we ever pay a hundred and fifty?"

"If our fathers would but give each man his proper portion, we should mend matters more easily."

"That's sure. I should know what to do directly."

Here Gregory interfered. "O ye fools, ye fools! With all their land entire, our elders can scarce make both ends meet; and ye think to lay by from a part thereof?"



They were struck dumb—stunned by the evidence of the truth he uttered.

"No," he went on to say; "the evil is not that our fathers will not give up their holdings, but that Lipka has too little land and too many people. A plot that gave food for three in our grandfathers' time must now be shared by ten."

"How true you speak!—Aye, it is the truth," they all agreed, much abashed.

"Then," someone proposed, "let's buy Podlesie, and share it amongst ourselves."

"Ye may buy a whole village; but whence shall the money come?" Matthew grunted.

"Wait a little: peradventure we may find a means."

"Wait, do as ye please; I have enough of waiting, and am disgusted.—I'll leave the country and go to the town!"

"Please yourself. But we—the others—must stay and take some step or other."

"The devil take it all! We are so close that I wonder the walls do not fall apart, so many we are in each hut, with misery clamorous therein: while hard by, there are broad lands, asking but to be taken up. No, were we starving, there's not the wherewithal to purchase it; nor can we borrow aught from anyone. To the devil with it!"

Then Gregory told them how things went on in other countries, and they listened mournfully, until Matthew interrupted him:

"Others are well off: what is that to us? Show a hungry man a dish and put it by: shall he fill his belly with the sight thereof? Elsewhere folk are protected; not so here, where every man grows like a wild tree upon waste land, and whether he succeeds or fails—provided only that he pay the taxes, serve in the army, and obey the officials—who cares?"

Gregory heard him out in silence, and started afresh.

"There is but one way to get Podlesie into our hands."

Here they pressed closer to him, for a sudden hubbub had filled the great room: the panes were shaking with it, and the music had ceased. Someone went out and returned to tell them with a laugh what had taken place. Dominikova

had come in with a stick for her sons, and caused a dreadful disturbance. She would have beaten and driven them home; but they had stood up to her, and made her leave the tavern; and now Simon was drinking to his heart's content, and Andrew, completely muddled, was howling up the chimney.

They cared to hear no more, for now Gregory set to expound his plan. It was for the village to be reconciled with the Squire and then barter each acre of the forest for four acres of the Podlesie land!

The possibility of such a solution equally surprised and delighted them; and Gregory went on to tell them how a similar agreement had been made with a village near Plotsk, of which he had read in the papers.

"Good for us peasants!—Jew, more vodka!" Ploshka called out through the door.

"Aye, for every three acres of forest, exactly twelve of cornland!"

"And for ten, a big holding!"

"But he ought to let us have some faggots besides for firing!"

"And an acre of meadow-land each by the wood-skirts into the bargain!"

"And some timber for building also!"

Everyone had a fresh condition to add.

"And a horse apiece too," Matthew sneered, "with a cart and a cow!"

"Be quiet!" cried Gregory.—"And now the farmers must meet, then see the Squire, and say what they wish to have. It may be that he will come to terms."

Here Matthew cut in.

"That he will not, unless the knife be at his throat. He needs money now: the Germans will give it him any day. Whereas, ere our people have scratched their heads and agreed on one single point, and ere their wives too have given their advice, a month will pass by, and the Squire will by then have sold the land and turned his back on us, having money to await the result of the lawsuit.



Gregory's plan is good; but, to my mind, it needs setting upside-down to work well."

"Say on then, Matthew, and advise us."

"Not to talk—not to take counsel—but to act! . . . as we did for the forest!"

"To act is possible sometimes, and sometimes not," Gregory muttered.

"I tell you it is possible . . . not by the same means, but to the same end.—Let us go tell the Germans not to venture on purchasing Podlesie!"

"Are they such fools—to fear us and obey?"

"If they refuse, we tell them they shall not either sow or build . . . nor move one step beyond their fields. Will they have no fear, think ye? Why, they would be like a fox that we smoke out of its earth."

But here Gregory burst out: "As there's a God in heaven, such threats will get us put in prison once more!"

"We should not lie in jail for ever; and when we got out, 'twould be all the worse for them! . . . They are no fools, and will first take good thought whether they have aught to gain by fighting us.—And when we have driven his buyers away, the Squire will take another tone.—Or if not . . ."

Gregory could keep silence no longer. Starting up, he did all he possibly could to dissuade them from such a reckless plan of campaign. He pointed out what actions at law must come of it, what fresh calamities to all of them, and the possibility of their being clapped in prison as rebels, and for several years! He showed, too, how everything might be arranged peaceably with the Squire alone. He went on talking to them till he was crimson, kissed them all, begged and implored them to give up that idea. All would not do, his words were in vain, and at last Matthew said:

"Ye are preaching! Ye talk like a book; but 'tis not what we want!"

At this they all set to banging their fists on the table, speaking at the same time, and shouting enthusiastically:

"Hurrah! Hurrah!—Down with the Germans! Away with the Long-Trousers! Matthew is right, we'll do as he says, and whoso fears, let him hide his face!"

They were so excited, there was no reasoning with them.

At this juncture the Jew came in, bringing a bottle: he listened, as he wiped the vodka spilt upon the table; then he said diffidently:

"'Tis good advice that Matthew is giving you."

"What! is Yankel against the Germans now? Can this thing be?" they cried in amazement.

"Because I prefer to hold with those of my own land. We live here—wretchedly, but by God's help we live. . . . But when the Germans have come, then not only a poor Jew, but even a dog, will have no food to eat. . . . Oh, may they all drop down dead! May the pestilence sweep them away!"

"What, a Jew to side with our folk! Who ever heard of such a thing!" They were astounded, stupefied.

"Yea, I am a Jew, but not a wild man of the woods: born here as you were, as my father and grandfather were too! . . . Am I not, then, one of you? . . . What is better for you will be better for me: the bigger farmers you will be, the more business I shall do with you.—And this wise plan of yours against the Germans I am ready to back thus, offering a whole bottle of rum! . . . To your healths, O farmers of Podlesie!" he exclaimed, drinking to Gregory.

They then drank very copiously, and became so joyful that they scarcely refrained from kissing the Jew's long beard: they set him in their midst, and went over the whole matter again, consulting him on every point. Even Gregory began after a time to feel less gloomy.

But now the meeting came to an end, for Matthew sprang to his feet. "To the big room, boys! let's stretch our legs!" he cried. "We've done enough for to-day." And they went in together.

Matthew immediately took Teresa out of another man's arms into his own. Following his example, the others



brought the girls out of the corners, called to the musicians and began to dance.

These suddenly set to playing up with great liveliness, being well aware how quick Matthew was both with kopeks and with blows.

In the tavern they were now at last dancing in earnest, with hot and steaming brows; and the din, and the stamping and music and boisterous cries, poured out of doors, as out of a boiling pot, by every aperture; and those outside, too, were enjoying themselves well, clinking glasses, drinking one another's health, and chatting ever louder and more excitedly.

It was night; the stars' rays shone keen and vivid, the trees rustled and murmured; from the marshes came the frogs' hoarse glee, and now and then a beetle passed by with a buzz. Nightingales sang in the orchards, and all was warm and fragrant. The people, too, longed to enjoy the cool night air, and now and again a couple, arms round waists, would leave the tavern to vanish into the shadows; while outside the conversation became so loud, everyone besides speaking quick and all together, that they were nearly unintelligible.

"... And hardly had I let the hog go, ere it had even time to put its snout among her potatoes, behold! she was upon me, bellowing!"

"... Drive her out of the village! Away with her!"

"... I remember that they did the same to one such in my young days. She was scourged even to blood in front of the church, and then driven outside our boundary marks; and we had peace."

"... Jew, a whole measure, and quickly!"

"... We must elect a new one: so say all."

"... Weed the evil out, ere its roots strike too deep!"

"... Now drink you to me, and I'll tell you what!"

"... Take the bull by the horns, nor loose it till 'tis down!"

"... Two acres and one are three: three and one are four!"

" . . . Drink, brother, dear as if you were my own!"

Thus scraps of sentences spurted out of the darkness, it being doubtful who spoke and who was spoken to: except when Ambrose, much the worse for liquor, was heard to pass from group to group, with his everlasting and whining request for a dram, though he staggered so heavily that he could hardly walk.

"You, Voytek, I baptized; I rang your wedding-bell until my arms were stiff: O brother, but one glass!—Or will you stand me a full dram? I'll ring her 'Everlasting Rest' and bring a second wife to you—a young one, firm of flesh as any turnip is!—Brother, a full dram, pray!"

And the young people danced on unweariedly; and the whole room was full of the rustling of waving skirts and capotes. Songs too were sung to the tunes of the music; the revels grew so wildly uproarious that even old women joined in leaping and capering with shrill screams; while Yagustynka, pushing forward to the middle, set her arms akimbo, and stamped on the floor to the lilt of the doggerel stave:

"I'd never fear wolves, were they more  
Than a score;  
Nor foes, were I fighting with men  
Ten times ten!"



## CHAPTER X

THE days between Corpus Christi and the next Sunday passed slowly for Matthew, Gregory, and their friends. Matthew had to suspend his work on Staho's cabin, and the others too gave up their occupations, all their days and evenings being devoted to stirring up the people against the German settlers, and urging upon them the necessity of driving the latter out of Podlesie.

On his side, the tavern-keeper was lavish of persuasions and—with opponents—of free drinks, and even loans. Nevertheless, it was very uphill work. The elders would scratch their heads and heave a deep sigh, but go no farther without consulting their women, who unanimously condemned any such enterprise against the Germans.

"What folly is this?" they cried. "Have we not suffered enough on account of the forest? One affliction is not yet past, and they would bring down another upon us?" And the wife of the Soltys, usually a quiet woman, was near taking a besom to Gregory!

"If you'd egg us on to another rising, I'll give you up to the gendarmes! The lazy rogues!—they won't work, and only want to lounge about!" she bawled at him outside her hut.

Balcerkova, too, stormed at Matthew as fiercely:

"Ye pack of idlers! I'll set the dogs at you! . . . Aye, and have boiling water ready besides!"

So they stood up stubbornly and unanimously against all persuasions, deaf both to arguments and to prayers, and would not hear reason. They clamoured against the men uriously, and often added tears to their clamours.

"I'll not let my goodman go! I will hang to the skirts

of his capote, and hold fast, aye, should they break my arms! We have had woes enough!"

Matthew cursed with rage. "May a brimstone thunderbolt blast you all!—Like magpies before rain: always shrieking, shrieking!—You'll sooner teach human speech to a calf than words of wisdom to a woman," he declared, bitterly disappointed.

"Let them alone, Gregory; you'll never get at their understanding," he complained. "Were the woman your wife, perchance she might listen then. Otherwise, the only argument for her is—a stick!"

"Nay, force is useless here," Gregory said; "we must employ some other means with them. We must not contradict them at first, we even must approve . . . so as to bring them round little by little."

He was unwilling to give all up for lost. Though he had at first opposed the plan, he had, when convinced it was the only thing to do, gone in for it afterwards with heart and soul. A bold stubborn fellow, determined to succeed in whatever he undertook, he allowed nothing to discourage him. They shut the door in his face; he talked to them through the window. They used threats; he, without loss of temper, flattered them freely, speaking to them of their children, praising their tidy ways, and little by little coming to the point; and if unsuccessful with one, he would go on to another. For two whole days, the village was full of him: in the cabins, in the gardens, even about the fields, talking of one thing, then of another, and at last coming to his subject. For such as found it hard to follow, he would draw a map in the dust of the domain of Podlesie and its divisions, so as to show forth the advantages of the plan of campaign to everyone. Yet in spite of these artifices his trouble would have been lost had it not been for Roch's assistance. On Saturday afternoon, seeing they could not carry the village with them, they asked Roch to come behind Boryna's granary; and there they opened their hearts to him, though much fearing lest he would oppose their scheme.



But after thinking a short time, he replied:

"A lawless proceeding it is; but we have no time to proceed otherwise.—I'll help you willingly."

At once he went to the parish priest, who was sitting in his garden, while his servant mowed the clover hard by. The servant told them later that his Reverence was at first angry with Roch, would not listen, and stopped his ears, but that they afterwards sat together talking for a long time. Roch had no doubt convinced him; for when the people came back at dusk from the fields, the priest went out as if to take the air, and, passing from cabin to cabin, he (talking first of indifferent matters) came at last to confer with the women chiefly, and dropped words to the following effect in the ears of each:

"The lads mean well. While there's yet time, haste must be made. Take your determination: I shall go to the Squire and advise him to agree." So, when he had overcome the women's opposition, the husbandmen began to perceive that a plan approved by the priest was worth following.

They still spent the evening in debate, but early on Sunday morning they had decided to go after Vespers with Roch at their head, who would talk matters over with the German settlers.

This he had promised them to do; and when they had gone home, shouting loud cuckoo-calls of delight, he remained seated in Boryna's porch, telling his beads and pondering deeply.

It was as yet early; they had but just cleared away after breakfast, Pete having lingered over his: a warm though yet not too hot day, with the swallows cutting the air swift as bullets. The sun had risen over the cabin, the grass glittered with dew in the shade; a fresh corn-scented breeze blew from the fields.

The hut, as usual on Sundays, was silent: the women busied with tidying the place, and the children out of doors, eating together at their porringer, and keeping Lapa off with spoons and cries. The sow grunted at the wall in the sunshine, the little ones nuzzling against her belly for milk;

the stork was driving the hens off and running about after the colt that frisked in the court-yard. The orchard trees whispered, their branches waved; from the fields outside, the humming of bees on the wing resounded, and the lark's song rang through the air.

This Sunday quiet was so deep that only the quacking of ducks about the pond was heard, or the laughter of the lads as they washed themselves there.

The roads lay deserted and bright in the sun, with very few wayfarers. Girls combed their locks on the door-step; and the notes of a shepherd's pipe bubbled forth.

Roch, as he said his rosary, heard all these sounds, but was mostly thinking of Yagna, whom he could hear bustling about within, sometimes coming close behind him, sometimes going out into the yard, and, as she returned, dropping her eyes before his, and flushing a deep red. He felt sorry for her.

"Yagna!" he whispered kindly, raising his eyes.

She stopped short with an intake of the breath, expecting he would say more. But he, as though doubtful of what he ought to say, only murmured a few inarticulate words and was silent.

She went her way again and sat down at the open window, where, leaning on the sill, she looked out mournfully upon the sunny scene and on the white clouds, wandering like wild geese through the bright fields of heaven. A heavy sigh burst from her bosom, and tears dropped more than once from her reddened eyelids, rolling slowly down her cheeks, now somewhat worn and thin. For ah! how much she had gone through in those last days! The women turned their backs upon her when she passed, and some spat after her. Her friends looked another way; the youngsters laughed contemptuously, and the youngest of the Gulbas family had once flung mud at her, calling out:

"The Voyt's leman, you!"

The words had stabbed her like a knife; and she felt suffocated with the shame of it.

But, in God's name, was she to blame in all this? He had



made her drunk—so drunk that God's world had vanished from her eyes!—And now they all accused her; the whole village fled from her as from one tainted, polluted: no one stood up in her defence.

And whither should she go now? They would slam the doors in her face—nay, set their dogs upon her. To flee to her mother's availed nothing: she, in spite of entreaties and wailings, had all but driven her away. . . . And, had it not been for Hanka, she would have done herself a mischief. . . . Aye, it was she—the wife of Antek—who alone had held out a helping hand to her and protected her from her enemies! . . . No, no, no! she was not guilty, the Voyt was! guilty of tempting her, of forcing her to sin . . . But the most guilty of all was . . . he! . . . that old monster! (She meant her husband!) "He has fettered my whole life . . . Had I been a free woman, would any have dared to injure me so? Nay, none. . . . And what have I enjoyed with him? Neither life nor freedom!"

As she went on brooding, her grief turned to passion, and she set to pacing the room under its sway. "In truth, he is the fountain-head of all I suffer . . . Without him, I should have lived in quiet still, as all the others do . . . The devil set him in my way, tempting my mother with that land . . . And now I must endure . . . endure!—Oh, may the worm devour you speedily!"

At this height of fury, she looked through the window, and perceived the litter with her husband in it under the trees. She ran out and, bending over him, hissed cruelly:

"Die, old dog! die! And the sooner, the better!"

He rolled his eyes at her and mumbled something; but she had gone. The outburst relieved her: she had someone on whom to revenge her grievances!

When she returned, the smith was standing in the porch, but feigned not to see her, and continued talking to Roch, raising his voice:

"Matthew is telling everyone in the village that ye are to go at their head and encounter the Germans."

"As they have begged me, I intend to go with them and

meet our new neighbours," he replied, with a stress on the last word.

"The Lipka people are forging fresh fetters for themselves—that's all. The affair with the Squire has turned their heads, and they fancy that a mob with sticks and shouts can deter the Germans from buying."

He was so angry that he could scarce control himself.

"Perhaps they may prefer not to buy: who knows?"

"Oh, indeed! The lots are measured out; the families have arrived. They are digging wells and laying corner-stones!"

"This much I know: the deed is not yet signed before the notary."

"It is as good as signed: so they have sworn to me."

"I speak of my own certain knowledge; and, should the Squire find better purchasers . . ."

"Not in Lipka, at any rate: no one smells very strong of money here."

"Gregory has made a few calculations, and, as I take it . . ."

"Oh, Gregory!" he interrupted rudely. "He is a meddler who misleads folk, and will only bring evil on them!"

"Well, we shall see how it turns out; we shall see!" Roch returned with a quiet smile, noting how the smith in his exasperation was tearing out his moustache.

"Here comes Paul of the police station!" he exclaimed, seeing the messenger enter the enclosure.

"An official paper for Anna Boryna," Paul said, taking an envelope out of his pouch.

Hanka turned it about uneasily, uncertain what to do with it.

"I'll read it for you," Roch said.

But as the smith came behind, to read it over his shoulder, Roch folded the paper immediately, saying without interest:

"A permission for you to visit Antek twice a week in future."

Roch waited till the smith had gone, and then followed Hanka into the cabin.



"The letter was not what I told you: I did not think the smith ought to know of it. Ye are advised that, either on your giving a sufficient guaranty or paying five hundred roubles into court, Antek will be set free directly.—What ails you?"

No reply. Her voice had failed her; she stood motionless, her face suffused with crimson first, then pale as death, her eyes blinded with tears. She stretched out her arms and, drawing a deep breath, fell on her face before the holy images.

Roch went out and, sitting down in the porch, read the document over again, smiling with joy. It was some time before he looked in again.

Hanka was on her knees, glowing with gratitude, her heart almost bursting with gladness. Short broken sighs and whispered ejaculations seemed to be filling the room with flashes and pillars of flame, fed with the fire of her life-blood, and rising up to the feet of Our Lady of Chenstohova. The bliss of it was almost too much for her to bear: her tears flowed in torrents, washing away the memory of all her past sorrows and sufferings.

At length she rose, and, wiping her tears away, said to Roch:

"And now I am ready for anything in the future. The worst that may hap will be less evil than what has been."

He looked with astonishment at the change that had taken place in her. Her eyes sparkled; her cheeks were no longer pale, but full of colour; she stooped no more, and looked ten years younger.

"Sell the things, quick," he said; "get the sum together, and we shall go to fetch Antek to-morrow or on Tuesday."

Dazed, she again and again repeated the words: "Antek is coming back—coming back!"

"Not a word about it! When he comes, why, folk will know of it anyway. Ah! and we must let it be supposed that he was set free unconditionally, or the smith would want to know where the money came from."

All this he told her in a low voice, and she promised to

obey, excepting Yuzka, however, whom she had to tell, and trust with the joyful secret; Hanka could hardly have borne alone such an awful weight of gladness. She went to and fro like one flushed with strong drink, kissed all the children twenty times over, talked to the colt, talked to the pig, and frisked with the stork; and as Lapa followed her about, looking wistfully into her eyes as if he understood something of the matter, she said in his ear:

"Tell no one, silly one! The goodman is coming home!"

Then she laughed and cried by turns, and spoke to Matthias, telling him all about it, till he rolled his eyes as if in fear, and made an indistinct murmur. And she so forgot the whole world that Yuzka had to remind her she must get ready for church.

She was so happy that she even wanted Yagna to come with them; but Yagna refused.

Her no one had told the news, but she easily guessed at it, from words dropped here and there, and from Hanka's extraordinary gaiety. The news elated her likewise, and touched her with a sort of silent hope; and, heedless of meeting people, she ran over to her mother.

She dropped in just when a terrific quarrel was at its height.

Directly after breakfast, Simon had sat down by the window, smoking a cigarette, and spitting about the room, while he considered and reflected for a long time, casting many a look at his brother. At last he said:

"Now, Mother, give me some money, for I have to put up the banns. The priest told me to come after Vespers for the examination in Religion."

"And whom would you wed?" she asked, with a bitter sneer.

"Nastka Golab."

She said no more, but busied herself about the pots on the fire-place. Andrew put some more wood on, and though the fire drew very well, he blew upon it out of sheer trepidation. Simon paused for a reply, and, getting none, spoke once more: this time in a more decided tone.



"I shall need a five-rouble note, for there is to be the betrothal ceremony besides."

"Oh!—And have ye sent her the proposers yet?"

"Klemba and Ploshka went to her."

"And the answer was Aye, no doubt?" Her chin wagged with chuckling.

"Most surely."

"She's the 'blind hen that happened on a grain,' hey? —The idea of a Nay from her, the beggarly thing!"

Simon knitted his brows, but waited to hear her say more.

"You, fetch me water from the pond; and you, Andrew, let the pig out: it is squealing."

They both obeyed mechanically. But when Simon returned to his place, and his younger brother was again pottering about the fire-place, the old dame commanded sternly:

"Simon, give the heifer to drink!"

"Do that yourself: I am not your maidservant!" he returned boldly, sprawling on the settle.

"Have you heard?—Drive me not to punish you on the Lord's Day!"

"Have ye heard me asking for money?"

Then she exploded: "Neither money nor leave to marry will I give!"

"Leave I can do without!"

"Simon, keep your temper. Make me not angry!"

On a sudden he bent down before her, humbly clasping her feet.

"See, Mother, I beg, I implore you; I am crouching at your feet like a dog!"

His voice was choked with sobs.

Andrew too fell prostrate at her feet, and kissed her hands, beseeching her and moaning pitifully.

She repulsed them both with fury, shaking her fist.

"Dare but to oppose my will," she cried out, "and I'll sweep you to the four winds of heaven!"

But Simon's hesitation was over now. Her words had roused him, and his blood boiled. The inborn stubbornness

of the Pacheses had laid hold on him: he stood up erect, and, striding forward:

"Give me the money!" he roared. "I shall wait no longer, nor beg for it any more!"

"Never!" she cried stormily, and looked about her for some weapon of offence.

"Then will I seek it!"

With a wildcat's leap, he bounded to the great chest, wrenched the lid open, and began to empty the clothing it contained on to the floor. She shrieked and darted at him, at first endeavouring to force him back; but she could not move him an inch. Then she caught hold of his thick fell of hair with one hand, battering his face with the other, while kicking his body and screaming all the time. He shook her off, and went on searching for the money; but, having received a terrible kick in the groin, pushed her away with such strength that she fell down flat upon the floor. She was up again, however, in an instant, and, seizing the poker, rushed at him. Unwilling to fight with his mother, he only tried to defend himself, attempting to wrest the poker from her hand. The din made the room ring again; and Andrew, in floods of tears, was hovering round them, weeping aloud and crying out:

"O Mother! for God's sake! O Mother!"

Yagna, coming in then, ran forward to stop the struggle. In vain. Dominikova stuck to him like a leech, and battered him with insane fury, though he tried to give way and leap aside: she assailed him all the more fiercely, raining down blows on him, till, maddened by pain, he struck back again.

So they flew at each other like quarrelling dogs, staggering backward and forward about the room, and hitting the walls and furniture with extreme violence.

The neighbours were now coming in, and striving to force them apart, but to no purpose. The fight went on, the mother belabouring the son, the son seeking to keep the mother at bay. But, at last losing patience, he put forth all his strength, grappled her round the waist and flung her



from him. She stumbled and fell like a log on to the blazing fire-place amongst the pots of boiling water; and the whole range came down on her with a crash!

They extricated her at once from among the fallen brickwork. She was fearfully scalded: yet, recking nothing of the pain nor of her burning petticoats, she wanted to fly at him still!

"Unnatural child! Accursed one! Away, away with you!" she bellowed with insane frenzy; and they had to use force to hold her back and quench the flames. They put wet compresses on to her scalds, and she yet was ready to rush at him again.

"Quit my sight! let me behold you nevermore!"

As for Simon, breathless, beaten all over, unable to utter a word, and streaming with blood, he stood staring at his mother in the utmost bewilderment and dismay.

The uproar had scarce begun to subside, when she tore herself free from the women round her, darted to the pole behind the fire-place on which Simon's things were hanging, pulled them all down and threw them out of the window.

"Go! may mine eyes not see you any more! Naught is yours here, all is mine! . . . You shall not have one strip of land, not one spoonful of food, were you dying of hunger!" she vociferated with the rest of her failing strength; and, overcome at last by the intensity of her pains, she then fell to groaning and screaming most horribly.

So she was carried to her bed.

So many people had pressed in that the cabin was chock-full, and the passage as well; even the open windows were blocked up with heads.

Yagna, at a loss what to do, was completely disconcerted. The old woman was now howling in frightful agony. No wonder: all her face and neck were scalded fearfully, her arms were burnt, her hair was singed off, and her eyes were all but sightless.

Simon had gone out and was sitting in their little orchard close to the cabin-wall, his chin resting on his fists, stiff as

a corpse, bruised all over, with clots of blood upon his face: he was listening to his mother's groans.

After a while, Matthew came up to him, saying, as he took him by the hand:

"Come over to our hut. You have naught to do here now."

"Go I will not! . . . The land is mine, the land of my forefathers, my own: here will I remain!" he growled with sombre obstinacy.

Neither arguments nor entreaties could prevail against him; he sat still, and spoke no more.

Uncertain what to do, Matthew seated himself near him; but Andrew made a bundle of the clothing just thrown out and, placing it before his brother, said timidly:

"With you, Simon! I'll go away with you!"

"O mothers of dogs!" cried the other, beating on the wall so hard that Andrew winced to hear him; "once for all I have said that I will not budge; and budge I will not!"

Now they were again silent; dreadful shrieks were heard within. Ambrose had come to bandage the old woman. He put fresh unsalted butter on the scalds and burns, covering them with the leaves of certain herbs, over which again he put a layer of curdled milk, and bound up the whole with moist bandages. Having directed Yagna to pour some cold water on the clouts every now and then, he hurried away to church, hearing that the Mass-bell was already beginning to tinkle.

It was Mass-time indeed; the roads were swarming with people, carts were rattling by, and so many acquaintances sought to call on the patient that Yagna was at length compelled to close her door on her prying neighbours, and only Sikora's wife remained with her.

And now there was again quiet in the hut. Dominikova was mute. The still murmurous drone of the organ was just audible; and the voices of the singers, with their plaintive, soothing, quavering melody, were wafted along through the orchards.



Both the young men were still sitting outside the hut. Matthew was talking on in a low voice; Simon nodding in reply; while Andrew, lying on the grass, gazed on the smoke of his brother's cigarette, rising in tangled threads above the thatch, like bluish gossamer.

Matthew rose at last, promising to come again in the afternoon. He intended to go to church, but at the sight of Yagna sitting at the water's brink, he drew near her.

Her pail stood full by her side; she was bathing her feet in the mill-pond.

"Yagna!" he whispered very low, approaching beneath the alders.

Instantly she let her skirt down over her knees, and bent a look on him—a look so tearful, so full of pain and sorrow, that he felt cut to the heart.

"What is it, Yagna? are you ailing?"

The trees waved very silently, pouring down their rain of lights and shadows upon her bright head, like a shower of green and gold.

"No, but things go not well with me. Not well." And she looked away from him.

"If I could but aid . . . or advise you . . ." he went on kindly.

"What? did you not lately turn away from me in my garden . . . and never come near me since?"

"For you had spurned me! . . . How could I dare? O Yagna!" His tone was gentle and full of sympathy.

"Aye, but I called after you, and you—you would not hearken!"

"Did you call me back, Yagna? Truly?"

"Truly.—I might have died and no one have come near me. I am a poor forlorn creature, that everyone is free to humble and ill-use!"

Her face was burning; she turned it away in confusion, splashing the water with her feet.—Matthew was reflecting.

All through the silence which ensued, the symphony of the organ went on trickling in a soothing gentle stream—a

streak of mellow sound. The mill-pond shimmered, rolling sinuous ripples from Yagna's feet, like iridescent serpents: while between her and him there passed warm glances, wreathed and twined together.

Matthew was growing more and more fascinated; he longed to take her in his arms and fondle her like a little child, pressing her to his breast and comforting her with the tenderest caresses.

"And I thought you unfriendly!" she whispered.

"Never was I that; and you know it."

"Never last year, peradventure," she said, but added unthinkingly: "All the same, ye have gone with the others now!"

All at once he remembered, with anger and jealousy gnawing at his heart.

"Because . . . because ye have . . . ye are . . ."

He could not utter the hateful words that choked him, and, checking himself, said harshly:

"Fare ye well!"

And he turned to leave her, lest he should reproach her with the Voyt.

"So once again you go!—But why? what harm have I done you?"

She felt startled and pained.

"None—none. . . . But—" and he spoke hurriedly, looking into her deep-blue eyes, and feeling sorrow, anger and tenderness rise up within him by turns—"but—Yagna! do put away from you that abominable creature! Put him away!" he repeated most earnestly.

"Ha! did I ever speak him fair? am I now doing aught to keep him?" she cried out angrily.

Matthew stood perplexed and hesitating.

A tempest of weeping shook her, and the tears poured down her glowing cheeks.

"Oh, the cruel wrong he did me!—To take my senses away! . . . And yet no one came forward on my behalf to accuse him! . . . No one has any mercy; ye all cry: Down, down with her!" she lamented bitterly.



"The villain! I will pay him out for it!" Matthew exclaimed, clenching his fist.

"Aye, pay him, Matthew! pay him! And ye shall have . . . !" Her eager appeal died away on her lips.

Without another word he hastened to the church.—She sat for a long time by the pond, wondering whether he would indeed take her part, and suffer no more wrong to be done to her.

"Antek, perchance!" the thought flashed through her brain.

She returned home, her mind agitated by secret but not unpleasant anticipations.

The bells were pealing as the people came out of church, and the air rang with their laughter; but those who passed by Dominikova's cabin went silently, with gloomy looks and meaning glances at one another.

None of the merry sounds that echoed through all the rest of the village during the noonday meal was heard in her hut. Nor was anyone eager to visit her, as she lay there moaning and feverish. Yagna, to whom a long stay by her side was unbearable, went out at times to the porch, now and then walking as far as the gate; or she would sit by the window, looking out with weary desire for change. Simon sat motionless outside. Andrew alone remembered that the dinner had to be cooked, and set about cooking it.

Some time after dinner, Hanka came to look in. She was in an odd state of excitement, asking questions without number, deeply interested in the sufferer, but at times casting a stealthy troubled glance in the direction of Yagna, and sighing deeply.

After a time, Matthew dropped in to see Simon.

"Will you go forth with us to the Germans?"

"This place will I not quit: 'tis my father's land and mine; from it I will not budge," he answered, full of one thought only.

"A great ass you are!—Sit ye here till to-morrow, if you will." Matthew was annoyed at this foolery; and as Yagna was then seeing Hanka to the gate on her departure, he went out with her, without bestowing so much as a look on the other.

They went along by the mill-pond road.

"Has Roch left the church yet?" he asked.

"Aye, and a good many peasants are waiting for him."

He glanced back, and saw Yagna gazing after them. Quickly turning his head round, and with eyes cast down, he inquired of Hanka:

"Is it true that the priest has denounced anyone from the pulpit?"

"Why ask?—Ye have heard."

"I came too late for the sermon.—They told me something, but I thought they were lying."

"He denounced . . . more than one.—Oh, how he clenched his fists!—To be stern with sinners, to throw stones at them—anyone can do that.—But there is no one can prevent the evil thing!" She felt deeply mortified at the slur on her own family, and her mood was very angry.—"But," she added, dropping her voice, "he made no allusion whatever to the Voyt."

Matthew cursed savagely. He would have put one other question, but hesitated; and they moved on in silence, Hanka much vexed at the whole business. Yes, Yagna had sinned, she said to herself. Yes, she deserved punishment. . . . But to be rebuked from the pulpit, and almost by her name—it was too much! . . . She was the wife of Boryna, and not a common drab!—He had said naught against Magda or the girls in the mill: yet all knew of their doings!—And the lady of the Manor of Gluhov: did not all know of her fondness for peasant lovers? Had he said one word of her? Her dignity as a Borynova was hurt.

"Did he . . . did he mention Teresa?" The question was put at last, so low that she scarcely heard it.

"Aye. He mentioned both. And everyone guessed of whom he was speaking. Someone must have set him against her."

He was near exploding with rage.

"They say it is either Dominikova's work or Balcerkova's. The former is avenging herself on you for Simon and



Nastka; the other would fain have you for her own girl Mary."

"Aha! Sits the wind in that quarter? I should not have dreamed it."

"Men only see what is under their noses."

"Well, Balcerkova has lost her trouble; and she may well be trounced for it yet by Teresa. Besides, to spite Dominkova, Simon shall marry Nastka: I'll see to that myself.—Those miserable hags!"

"They work out their schemes, and honest folk have to suffer for them," she said with sorrow.

"Each one tries to hurt everyone else: 'tis hard to bear life here."

"So long as Matthias was with us, they had someone to keep them in bounds, someone to listen to."

"Very true. Our Voyt is a fool who knows naught, and who plays such pranks that the folk can abide him no longer. Oh, if Antek were but to come back!"

"He will—he will! And shortly! But"—and her eyes sparkled—"would he be obeyed?"

"Yes. 'Tis settled between me and Gregory and the others. And when he returns, we shall set the village in order, with him at our head. Ye shall see."

"It is high time. Things here are getting loose, as a wheel when the linchpin has dropped off."

They were now at the hut, where several people had already gathered in the porch—somewhat under a score of farmers ready to start, along with the best of the farmhands. Yet (as previously, and for the forest expedition) all the villagers had declared that they would go . . . to a man!

"Our Voyt ought to come with us," someone observed, stripping the bark off a stick.

"The Head Official," another answered, "has summoned him to the District Office; and the scrivener says he will be ordered to call a meeting and get a school voted by Lipka and Modlitsa."

"He may call a meeting, but we'll vote no school!" laughed Klemba.

"We should have at once so much more per acre to pay in taxes. Just as in Vola."

"Surely," the Soltys admitted; "but when the Head Official gives an order, we have to obey."

"What orders have we to take from him? Let him order his gendarmes not to join with the thieves to rob us!"

"Gregory, you are growing saucy," said the Soltys severely. "Men's tongues have ere now taken them farther away than they wished to go!"

"Ye shall not put me down. I know our rights, and fear no Head Official. Only you poor ignorant sheep shake from head to foot before every Jack in office."

He spoke so loud that they were shocked at his rashness, and more than one felt his flesh creep. Klemba went on to say:

"But truly, such a school is of no use to us! For two years my boy Adam went to the school in Vola. The teacher got three bushels of potatoes a year from me, and eggs and butter from my wife besides at Yuletide and Easter. And what has come of it all? He can neither read a Polish prayer-book nor say his ABC in Russian! Whereas my younger ones, whom Roch taught last winter, can both make out writing, and read the books our gentry read."

"Then," said Gregory, "let us engage Roch to teach our children."

Here the Soltys stepped a little aside from the group, and said, lowering his voice:

"Roch would be the best, I know, and he has taught my boys; but it cannot be. The police have found out something, and they are on his trail. The Superintendent saw me in the office, and inquired diligently about him—said he was sure that Roch taught the children, and distributed Polish books and newspapers to the folk.—We must tell him to take good heed."

"That's a bad business," said old Ploshka. "He's a good



religious man; but the whole village may come to great harm through him. . . . Yes, measures must be taken—and quickly.”

“What, man!” said Gregory in an indignant whisper; “are ye such a coward as to think of betraying him?”

“Should he stir up the people against the Government to the destruction of us all, we ought all to do so. You are young; but I recollect well what took place in the war of the gentry, and how we peasants were cudgelled formerly for the least thing we did. With them we have naught in common.”

“Ah, ye would fain become Voyt! And ye are no more good than a boot with a hole in it!”

They said no more, for Roch then came out of the cabin, looked round at the people, crossed himself, and cried:

“It is time!—On, in the name of the Lord!”

He stepped forward, and behind him surged the mass of peasants in the middle of the road, with a few women and children after them.

The heat of the day was over, the bells were just pealing for Vespers, and the sun was rolling forestward. It was fine bright weather, and the sky-line showed so clear that the remotest villages were made out distinctly.

To keep up their spirits, some of the men were striking the ground with their oaken cudgels; some spat in their palms, and put on an indomitable mien as they marched along.

The women went no farther than the mill, while the men went on slowly up the slope, their feet raising puffs of dust.

They trudged on in silence, with proud hard faces and eyes glittering defiantly.

Their ranks moved as solemnly as in a procession, and if anyone began talking, the stern looks of the others silenced him soon. It was no time for conversation then: each man withdrew within himself to find courage and strength there for what was coming.

At the cross and the village landmarks they stopped awhile to rest. But they were still silent, gazing out upon the land-

scape: on the huts of Lipka, scarce visible amongst their orchards; on the gilt cupola of the village church; on the vast expanse of green, green fields. And, as they listened to the shepherds' pipes playing far away and drank in the sweet peace and joy of springtime all around, many of them felt a dull sinking of heart, and looked out towards Podlesie with painful misgivings.

"Come!" Roch cried to stir them up; "we are not here to trifle the time away!" For he saw in his men clear signs of weakening resolve.

They turned and made straight for the farm-buildings. Their way led them through lands overgrown with weeds, miserable rye-fields, blue with corn-flowers, patches of late-sown oats, all yellow with flowers of gold, land where the thin wheat crop was quite scarlet with wild poppies, and plots where the potatoes were hardly above ground yet. Gross carelessness and neglect were seen at every step.

"A Jew could not have tilled the land worse! It is an eyesore!" growled one of the men.

"The worst farm-hand would have done better work."

"This one, though a great owner, has had no respect for the sacred land which is his!"

"No, he treats it as one that only milks and never feeds his cow: small wonder if it gives him naught!"

They had now reached the fallows. At a slight distance rose the dingy ruins of the burnt buildings; the orchard was black with charred trunks. Around stood the mesuages, some of the roofs fallen in, and the chimney-stacks standing up stark and black. Near the houses a group of persons was to be seen: they were the Germans. A cask of beer stood upon the paving-stones; a man on a door-step played the flute; the others, either lolling on benches or upon the grass, were taking their ease, in shirt-sleeves, with pipes in their mouths, and drinking beer out of earthenware jugs. Some children frisked outside the house, and lusty cows and horses grazed hard by.

They saw the men coming; for they started up, looking in the direction of the new-comers, shading their eyes, and



bawling out in their own speech. But one of them, an old man, said a few words, and they sat down quietly to drink again. The flute-player played his sweetest strain; high above their heads the larks sang; while from the corn, the rapid and incessant shrilling of the crickets dinned yet louder in the ear, and the piping of the quails was heard from time to time.

The ground, baked by the sun, sounded hard beneath the peasants' feet, and the stones rang under their hobnailed boots as they drew near: the Germans remained motionless, as though they had not heard anything, but sat enjoying their beer and the fragrance of the evening air.

The men, coming in with slow ponderous tread, were close to them now, grasping their sticks tight and striving to breathe easily; but their hearts were throbbing, a hot thrill ran down their backs, and their throats went very dry. Nevertheless, they drew themselves up, and glared boldly at the Germans.

"Praised be . . .," said Roch in German, coming to a halt, while the whole company drew up in a crescent behind him.

The Germans replied in chorus, but without moving from their places. The grey-bearded old man alone rose and gazed around him, turning somewhat paler.

"We," Roch began to say, "have come to see you on a certain matter."

"Then sit ye down. I see that ye are husbandmen of Lipka: let us talk together in neighbourly wise.—Johann! Fritz! bring settles for our neighbours."

"Many thanks, but our business will be soon over: we may as well stand."

"Soon over?" he cried in Polish. "Can that be, when the whole village has come?"

"That is but because the matter interests all equally."

"Also," Gregory added meaningly, "we have left thrice as many at home."

"Well, we are glad to see you.—And, since ye have been the first to pay a visit, perchance ye will taste some beer with us."

"How generous!" cried several voices. "'Twas not for beer we came!"

Roch hushed them with a glance. The old German said dryly:

"We are listening."

A stillness ensued, in which quick short breathing was heard. The men of Lipka drew closer together, trembling with excitement; the Germans rose like one man and faced them in serried array, exchanging fierce looks with the peasants, and muttering low, and twirling the strands of their beards.

The women looked on, terrified; the children ran to hide in the passages; close at the wall, a few tan-coloured dogs began to snarl; while, for the space of one "Hail Mary" at least, the men stood facing one another in profound silence, like a troop of rams, with fiery eyes rolling, backs tense, heads lowered, and ready at any moment to charge one at the other. Then Roch broke the silence, thus speaking in Polish, in clear ringing tones:

"We come in the name of the whole village to request you—and in friendly wise—not to complete the purchase of Podlesie."

"Right! Quite right! We come for that!" they all agreed, striking on the ground with their sticks.

For the Germans, this was a thunderclap.

"What says he? What would he have? We understand naught," they stammered, thinking they had not heard aright.

Roch therefore repeated his request, this time in German; and when he had done, Matthew burst out with the words: "And to take yourselves away—you and your long trousers—to all the devils!"

At this, they jumped as though doused with boiling water. The quarrel then began and waxed furious, all the more embroiled by their fierce-sounding unintelligible jargon, as they stamped their feet and waved their arms; some of them, with lifted fists, making as if to rush at the peasants, who stood firm and immovable as a wall, eyeing them with



bold looks and clenched teeth, while their hands twitched nervously upon their cudgels.

"What, are ye all mad?" exclaimed the old man, with uplifted hands. "Would ye forbid us to purchase land? Wherefore? and by what right?"

Roch calmly explained the whole situation in all its details; but the German, reddening with anger, cried out:

"The land belongs to him that pays for it!"

"We," Roch replied gravely, "think otherwise: we think the land should belong to him that hath need of it."

"Belong? And how? Without payment, by robbery per-adventure?" he cried with a sneer.

"Our hands can give exceeding good payment," Roch answered in the same tone.

"Why shall we waste time bandying jests? We have bought Podlesie; it is ours, and ours it shall remain. And whoso likes not this, let him go his way, and not come near us!—Well, wherefore do ye wait?"

"Wherefore?" Gregory exploded. "To tell you: 'Hands off the land that's ours!'"

"Take yourselves off it, you!"

Here someone called out: "Mark this: ours has been a neighbourly request . . . so far!"

"Ye threaten us? Then we'll go to law! Oh, there are means to master you. Your term of jail for the forest brawl is not yet done: you will get some more, and do both terms together!" The old man attempted to laugh, but was too much upset, and his companions were exasperated.

"Ye lousy devils!"

"Thievish, stinking hounds!" they shouted in German, writhing about like snakes disturbed in their nest.

"Dogs' blood! be silent when men speak to you!" Matthew thundered at them; but they cared nothing for him, and began to come on in a body.

Roch, fearing there would be violence, got his men together and urged them to be calm; but they were out of hand, each vociferating louder than the other.

"A slap in the face to the first who comes near us!"

"They want to have a little blood let!"

"What, boys! shall we let them flout all our people thus?"

"No, no! we must not—we must not!" cried the rest, pressing threateningly forward, till Matthew, setting Roch aside, pushed on to the Germans, showing his teeth like an angry wolf.

"Hear me, ye Germans!" he roared, clenching his fists.

"We have spoken to you words of kindness, with honest intent; and you not only menace us with prison, but insult us as well! Good; but we play another game with you henceforth. Ye refuse to agree: therefore here we swear to you, before God and man, that you shall never settle down in Podlesie. We came to offer peace: you chose war. Very well: war let it be! Ye have the courts for you, the officials for you, the power of money for you; and we—nothing but our bare hands. And who will get the better—we shall see!—Let me say, besides, that ye may remember it after: Fire can burn, not straw only, but even brick-built houses, even unripe corn; and cattle may come to fall down in the pasture-lands; and men may be unable to escape deadly misadventure. Remember this that I have told you: war by day, war by night, war in every place."

"War! War!—So help us God!" they all cried together.

The Germans sprang to their long staffs, standing by the wall; some ran for their guns or took up stones, while the women shrieked aloud.

"Let but one man shoot at us: all the villages will be here anon!"

"Kill one man, Long-Trousers! and ye'll be beaten to death, as men beat a mad dog!"

"O Swabians! tackle not us peasants, or ye'll be tackled yourselves."

"And so well that the hungriest dog would not touch your carcasses!"

"Dare but to touch us, Long-Trousers!" they cried in loud defiance.

And now both parties were about to close, each glaring at the other, stamping, beating on the ground with their



sticks, flinging menaces and insults broadcast, and boiling over with eagerness to clapperclaw the enemy. But Roch at last succeeded in drawing his party somewhat to the rear; and his men, wheeling round, carefully protected their flanks as they withdrew, followed by the derisive shouts of the Germans.

"Away from our country, abominable swine!"

"Or stay till the Red Cock wake you up at night!"

"We shall look in again to dance with your maidens!"

Their language at last grew so strong that Roch was obliged to silence them.

And now twilight had come; a cool wind swept the corn, the dew lay silver-grey on the damp grass, and evening, quiet and fragrant, reigned over the land.

The men were coming home, their white capotes flapping behind them. They talked and sang till the woods rang again, stopping from time to time, whistling and gloating over the Podlesie fields.

"They are easy to portion out, these lands," said old Klemba.

"Aye, we can divide them into complete farms—each with its own meadow and bit of pasture."

"Provided the Germans give in!" said the Soltys, with a sigh.

"No fear: we know they will," Matthew said reassuringly.

"I should like the piece near the road, just at the end," said Adam Prychek.

"And I," said another, "the one in the middle, near the cross."

"And I," said a third, "want the patch close to Vola."

"Oh," sighed a fourth, "could I but get the garden-plot in the farm itself!"

"No fool you! You would snap up the best lot of all!"

"Come, come; there's enough for us all," Gregory said to pacify them, for they were near quarrelling over it!

"If the Squire agrees and gives up Podlesie to you," observed Roch, "you will all have a great deal of work to do."

"We shall manage to get through with it, though!" they cried in great glee.

"Work on one's own land is never hard toil!"

On such terms, who would not willingly take all the lands of the Squire?"

"Let him but give it you—you would see!"

"Why, we should take root in the soil, like trees; let him pluck us thence who can!"

And so they talked on, as they neared home; faster now, for they saw the women running out to meet them.



## CHAPTER XI

IT was early dawn, and all the country was covered over with a deep azure bloom of haze like a ripe plum, when Hanka drove up to the cabin, whose inmates were all asleep as yet. But with the sharp clatter of the wheels, Lapa fell to barking for joy, and leaping up in front of the horses.

"Why, where is Antek?" Yuzka exclaimed on the doorstep, putting on her skirt over her head.

"He is to be released in three days only," was the tranquil reply, as Hanka kissed the little ones, and distributed pastry among them.

Vitek now came running out of the stable, and after him trotted the colt, whinnying and going straight to the mare, still in harness, while Pete was taking the parcels out of the cart.

"Have they begun to mow yet?" she asked, sitting down at once on the threshold to give suck to her baby.

"Yes, they began at noon yesterday: five of them. Philip, Raphael and Kobus to work out their debts to us; Adam Klemba and Matthew for hire."

"What?—Matthew Golab?"

"I too thought it strange; but he would have it so. Said his carpentry work made him stoop too much, and he wanted to get straight again, scythe in hand."

Yagna then opened her window and looked out.

"Is Father sleeping still?" she was asked.

"Aye, in the orchard. We left him out at night, so hot it is within doors."

"And your mother, what of her?"

"As usual; perhaps somewhat better. Ambrose, who tends her, came yesterday with the shepherd of Vola, who fumigated her, rubbed her with ointment, and said that, provided

she stays at home till the ninth Sunday from now, she will by then be healed."

"'Tis the best remedy for a scald!" she said, and, passing her baby to the other breast, listened attentively to what had occurred in her absence. But not for long: it was now broad daylight, the sky flushing red with bright streaks athwart the air. Dewdrops fell from the trees; birds were garrulous in their nests; bleating and lowing resounded all through the village, and hammers, hammering scythe-blades, whose thin keen tinkling made a piercing din.

No sooner had Hanka undressed after her journey than she ran to Boryna, who was lying asleep under a bed of down, in a great basket beneath the trees.

"Hark!" she said, pulling him by the arm; "Antek will be home in three days. He had been taken to the Government prison. Roch followed him with money that must be paid. Both will come home together."

On a sudden the old man sat up, rubbed his eyes, and seemed to listen; but he sank back at once, pulled the down covering over his head and fell asleep again.

There was no more talking with him; besides, the mowers were just then coming into the yard.

"Yesterday," Philip told Hanka, "we mowed the meadow adjoining the cabbage-plot."

"To-day ye will go beyond the river, by the boundary-market; Yuzka will show you where."

"'Tis in Duck's Hollow; a big piece of land."

"And the grass comes up to the waist, lush and rank: very different from yesterday's meadow."

"Was the grass so poor there?"

"Aye, all but dried up: it felt like cutting a brush."

"Then it may be tossed this very day, since the dew will soon be quite dry."

They started at once: Matthew, smoking a cigarette in Yagna's room, was the last, and cast a rueful look behind him as he went, like a cat balked of its bowl of milk.

The rest of the village, too, soon poured forth its troops of mowers.



Scarcely had the sun risen, huge and ruddy, when the weather grew warm, and presently very hot indeed.

On the mowers marched, in Indian file, preceded by Yuzka, dragging a pole after her.

They passed the mill. The meadows were veiled in a low creeping haze, through which tufts of alders peered out like puffs of dark smoke; here and there the river peeped from under its greyish screen, glittering brightly; the dew-drenched grasses drooped their heads in the meadows, and the piping of lapwings came on the eastern breeze, scented with the bland fragrance of many blossoms.

Yuzka, having taken them as far as the landmarks, measured the extent of her father's meadow-land, stuck the pole up at the border, and scampered away home.

Pulling off their spencers and tucking their breeches up, they formed into line, and thrust the scythe-handles into the ground, to sharpen the blades with their whetstones.

"The grass is as thick as the wool of a fleece; some of us will sweat soundly," said Matthew, who stood first, testing the sweep of his scythe.

"Thick it is—and tall!" said his neighbour. "Well, there'll be plenty of hay."

"Yes, if the weather be fine," said a third, glancing up at the sky.

"When you're mowing a meadow, rain always is ready," remarked the fourth, with a grin.

"The saying's not true this year!—Come, begin, Matthew!"

They all crossed themselves. Matthew tightened his girdle, straddled forward, spat on his palms, took a deep breath, and launched his scythe far into the grass, plying it with swift strokes; the others following him one after another, in a slanting line, for fear of accidents. So they cut their way into the mist-covered meadow with a steady rhythmical advance, their cold blades glistening, with a swish at every stroke, and forming long swaths heavy with dewdrops.

The breeze rustled in the grass; overhead, the lapwings

screamed more and more plaintively: and they, rocking their bodies from right to left, mowed on unweariedly, conquering the meadow foot by foot. Only now and again did one or another of them halt to whet his scythe or straighten his back, and then once more he mowed away with a will, leaving behind him ever more and more numerous swaths.

Before the sun had risen above the village, all the meadows echoed beneath the strokes of the mowers: the blue steel of the scythe-blades flashed everywhere; everywhere could be heard the stridulous clang of the whetstones; everywhere the strong perfume of mown grass was inhaled.

It was perfect weather for haymaking. An ancient adage says, indeed: "Begin to make hay: rain will fall the same day"; but this year it was quite the other way round. Instead of rainy weather, there was drought.

The days began, moist with dew, and yet parched, like a man in a fever; they ended in nights baked with heat. Some wells and rills had been dried up; the corn was turning yellow, the plants withered away. Countless insects assailed the trees, which began to cast their yet unripe fruit. Cows, returning hungry from the sere grass of the pastures, had ceased to give milk; and the Squire allowed none to graze their beasts on his clearings but those who paid him five roubles a head.

Very many had not so much cash to pay him.

But, setting aside these particular inflictions, the hard times usual before harvest were this year harder than ever.

They had reckoned on rain falling surely in June, and the field crops benefiting thereby: nay, money had even been offered for Masses to that intention. And now, some had really nothing to put in the pot!

But the worst of all was that not even the oldest inhabitant could remember a time when there had been so many law troubles: the great forest action not yet settled, and the Voyt's affair still setting people by the ears, and Dominkova's quarrel with her son, and the Germans, and many another matter of dispute between neighbours: so many, in



fact, that what with such incessant brawls and wranglings, they almost forgot their more material afflictions.

Of course then, as soon as ever haymaking time had come round, all the people began to breathe more freely, the poorer among them hurrying off to seek work at the Manor farms, and the wealthier peasants, deaf to all other matters, setting at once to mow their grass.

They did not, however, quite forget the Germans, but got someone or other to go daily and see what they were about.

They still were there, but had given up digging wells and fetching stones to build; and, as the blacksmith announced one day, they had laid a complaint against the Squire for money matters, and against the men of Lipka for "threats and conspiracy."

At this the peasants laughed very heartily.

It was just this topic which was discussed that day in the meadow at dinner-time.

An intensely hot noontide, with the sun overhead, the sky hanging above with a whitish glow, a blasting heat around as from an oven; no breath of wind; leaves shrivelling up; birds silent; short thin shadows that scarcely shaded at all; the strong aroma of the heated grasses; corn and orchards and huts standing as if wrapped in white flame; all things, as it were, melting away in the air that trembled like water simmering on the fire. Even the river ran more slowly, its stream shining like fused glass, so transparent that beneath the surface-currents every gudgeon, every stone at the sandy bottom, every crayfish scuffling about in the luminous shadows of the banks, showed forth clear and distinct. A deep calm, spinning its slumberous web, crept over the sunlit earth; and nothing was noisy save the buzzing flies.

The mowers sat down on the river-bank, beneath a clump of tall alders, eating their dinner out of the porringers brought, for Matthew by his sister Nastka, for the others by Hanka and Yagustynka. These seated themselves on the grass in the sun's full glare, and, with their kerchiefs drawn over their heads, listened attentively to the talk.

"I," said Matthew, scraping his emptied porringer, "have always held that the Germans would take themselves off one of these days."

"The priest held so too," Hanka remarked.

"And so they will, if the Squire wills it," growled Kobus, always ready to argue, stretching himself out under a tree.

"What?" Yagustynka asked, sneeringly as usual; "did they not fear the noise ye made, and run?"

Her jeer was unnoticed, and someone observed:

"The smith said yesterday that the Squire would come to terms with us."

"Strange that Michael is on our side now!"

"He has," the old woman hissed, "found he would get more thereby."

"The miller too, they say, has pleaded at the Manor-house for the village."

"Those good souls! They are all on our side now!" said Matthew. "Why?—I'll tell you. The Squire promised the smith a goodly reward for the reconciliation. The miller fears the Germans may set up a windmill on the high ground in Podlesie. And the tavern-keeper befriends the people out of fear for himself: he knows well that where a German settles, no Jew can get his bread."

"The Squire wishes to be reconciled: does he fear us peasants, then?"

"Ye have hit the mark, Mother; of all of them, he is the most afraid."

Here Matthew broke off; Vitek was coming from the village at full speed.

"Mistress, come at once!" he bawled from a distance.

"What, is the house on fire?" she faltered, terrified.

"'Tis Master, and he is crying out for something."

She ran off instantly.

The fact was that, ever since morning, Matthias had been strange, plucking at his coverlet and seeming to look for something. Before setting out for the meadow, Hanka had charged Yuzka to take special care of him, and the latter had many a time gone to look; but he had lain quiet till



about dinner-time, when he suddenly fell a-shouting very loud.

On Hanka's arrival, he sat up, and called out:

"My boots—where are they? Give them to me, and quickly too!"

"I'll get them from the store-room in an instant!" she said, to pacify him; for he seemed quite sensible, and looked keenly about him.

"Mother of dogs! how I have overslept myself!" and he yawned wide and deep.

"It is broad day, and ye are sleeping, all of you!—Let Kuba get the harrow ready," he commanded; "we shall go out and sow."

They stood before him, hesitating, when he suddenly collapsed, falling helpless to the ground.

"Fear not, Hanka, I had a fit of dizziness. Is Antek afield, hey?—Afield?" he repeated, when they had replaced him on the bed.

"Aye," she stammered. "Ever since daybreak." For she feared to cross him.

He looked about him brightly and talked much; but one word out of ten was sense, and the rest drivel. He again wanted to get up and go out, called for his boots—and then put his hands to his head and moaned pitifully. Hanka knew that the end was at hand; so she ordered him to be borne within doors, and sent for the priest in the afternoon.

He came presently with the Holy Sacrament, but could only give him Extreme Unction.

"His state needs nothing more," the priest said; "in a few hours he will be with his fathers."

In the evening, many people visited the cabin, for he seemed on the point of death; and Hanka put the lighted taper of the dying in his hand. But presently he fell into a quiet sleep.

The next day there was no change. He recognized people, and spoke sensibly, but lay for hours together as still as a corpse.

The smith's wife was at his bedside continually; also Yagustynka, who wanted to fumigate him!

"Let alone; ye may set the place on fire," he burst out unexpectedly.

And at noon, when the smith came and looked into his half-closed eyes, he smiled strangely, and uttered these words:

"Do not trouble, Michael; I shall drop off soon enough—soon enough!"

So saying, he turned his face to the wall, and spoke no more. He was evidently going rapidly downhill, so they now watched him with care; especially Yagna, over whom an extraordinary change had come.

"I alone shall tend him! It is my right," she had told Hanka and Magda so peremptorily that they had not opposed her.

She no longer left the cabin at all: a vague terror oppressed her.

All the village was out in the meadows: the haymaking had been going on since dawn; ever since the very first faint flush in the sky, they had started for the meadows. Rows of peasants in shirt-sleeves, looking like grey storks, were now all over the lands, whetting their flashing scythes, and mowing amain all day long; all day the hammers rang upon the scythes, and the girls sang their merry impromptus as they raked up the cut grass.

All those verdurous glossy flats were swarming with people, noise and clamour; loud ditties and peals of laughter resounded to the accompaniment of the tinkling blades, and the work went on everywhere with energy and goodwill. Every day, too, when the blood-red sun was descending towards the woods, and the air full of the twittering of the birds, and grass and corn alike seemed quivering to the crickets' merry notes, while the frogs in the marshes struck up their croaking serenade, and perfumes rose from the incense-breathing earth—then all along the roads were crawling great heavy wagons filled with hay; the mowers



went home with songs, and on the meadows, now yellow and trampled, stood close crowds of haycocks and ricks, like so many fat gossiping dames, squatting down to have a quiet talk together. Amongst these the storks strutted, above them the lapwings wheeled, with their sad piping cry; and on towards them the white mists came driving up from the marshes.

Through Boryna's window there came these voices of men and of the land—the glad sounds of life and toil, and the aromatic scents of corn and meadow and sunlight; but Yagna was deaf to them all.

The undergrowth round the cabin protected it from the glare and spread within it a greenish slumberous twilight. Flies buzzed; and now and then Lapa, watchful beside his master, would yawn, and then go and fawn upon Yagna, who sat for hours without motion or thought—as still as a statue.

Matthias spoke no longer, moaned no longer. He just lay still; but his eyes rolled unceasingly—those bright eyes of his, as shiny as glass globes, following her with cold persistency, piercing her through and through like knife-blades.

She turned her back on him, endeavouring to forget. It was in vain—in vain! They peered out at her from every sombre nook, floated in the air, glowing with fearful brilliancy, and a fascination so irresistible that she had to obey their call and stare back into them as into some unfathomable abyss.

At times, as though waking from a horrible dream, she would beseech his mercy: "Prithee, look not thus: ye are tearing my soul out of me: look not thus!"

No doubt he heard her: a quiver passed over him, his face twitched dumbly, as if to cry out, his eyes stared yet more gloomily, and big tear-drops rolled down his livid cheeks.

Then, driven by sheer terror, she would rush from the hut. Hidden in the shade of the trees, she would peep out at the meadows full of people and of tumultuous joy.

And the sight made her cry bitterly.

Then she fled to her mother's. But hardly had she looked in and seen the darkened room and scented the rank pungency of the medicines, when she would hasten away once more.

And again she would weep.

Then she wandered abroad, and looked out upon the country-side with longing eyes. But thence sprung yet more bitter and dreary and agonizing tears; and she mourned grievously over her own sad lot, like a bird with broken wings, deserted by its mates.

Thus one day after another went by without any change. Hanka, along with the rest of the village, was absorbed in haymaking, and it was only on the third day that she stayed at home since morning.

"'Tis Saturday: Antek is sure to come!" she thought joyfully, setting the cabin in order to receive him.

Noon came and went, and he was not there yet. Hanka ran beyond the church to look up the poplar road.

They were carting the hay, hurrying it home, for the weather was about to change. The air was stiflingly sultry, cocks were crowing, hailstorm clouds hanging about in the sky, winds wheeling and whirling.

All expected a storm with a great downpour, but there only came down a short though plentiful rain, at once swallowed up by the thirsty soil, and only cooling the air a little.

The evening, somewhat less sultry, was redolent of hay and of the sprinkled earth. Mists rolled along the ways; the moon had not risen yet; the dark sky was but scantily studded with stars. Through the orchards, the light of the cabins glimmered like glow-worms, reflected in the pond and multiplied to myriads. Everywhere the people took their supper out of doors. Hard by, the air trembled with the rippings of a pipe; from the fields came floating the crickets' feeble ditty, along with the voices of the land-rail and the quail.

At Boryna's, too, they were all outside the hut: the hay



being brought home, Hanka had invited them to a first-class supper; and the great dish clinked with the tapping of the spoons in a lively measure. Yagustynka's rasping tones were often heard, accompanied with shouts of laughter. Every now and then, Hanka would fill the dish again from the pots, while anxiously watching all the time for any least sound on the road; and she frequently slipped out into the enclosure, looking for Antek.

There was not the least trace of him; and only once did the shape of Teresa, leaning against the hedge, no doubt waiting for somebody, meet her eyes.

Matthew, unable that day to get speech of Yagna, who was then sullen and unpleasant of mood, was beginning to wrangle with Pete out of sheer ill humour, when Andrew came to call his sister, whom her mother wanted to see.

The party broke up thereupon; but Matthew lagged behind for some time.

Hanka also went out a little after for another vain look into the darkness, when she heard his voice, gruff and cross, wafted from the mill-pond bank.

"Why dog me so? I shall not flee you. . . . Are we not enough on the lips of folk already?"—He added still more cruel words, to which there came in answer a storm of sobs and a flood of tears.

But there was nothing in that to interest Hanka, who was awaiting her husband: she cared little then for other folks' doings. Yagustynka did the evening household work for her, whilst she herself dandled in her arms the baby, that was rather troublesome; carrying it out with her and rocking it, she went to see the patient.

"Antek may be here at any moment!" she cried from the door-step.

Boryna was lying with eyes fixed on a lamp that smoked above the fire-place.

She whispered in Boryna's ear: "He has been released to-day, Roch is awaiting him," and her beaming eyes watched him to see if he had understood. It seemed not: he neither moved nor looked at her.

"He may be in the village by now. Belike it is so," she thought, as she ran out every now and then to see.—So sure was she of his return, so agitated with her long wait, that she spoke to herself, walking unsteadily as one drunk. To the darkness she talked about her hopes, and confided in the cattle as she milked them, informing them all that their master was coming back.

She waited on.—But every minute was wearing out her strength and her patience.

Night was there, the village abed. Back from her mother's, Yagna had gone to rest at once. All in the house were sleeping presently. Hanka still watched outside the hut, and far into the night; but at last, exhausted with weariness and crying, she too put out the light and lay down.

The whole land was now plunged in the deep stillness of repose.

The village lights had gone out one by one, like eyes that close in slumber.

The moon rolled up the soaring black-blue sky, sown with a twinkling dust of stars, and rose higher and higher, as a bird that wings its way athwart the void on silver pinions. The scattered clouds slept, huddled up into balls of soft white down; whilst on the earth all creatures lay quiet, wearied out and lost in sleep. Only a bird sang sweet exuberant lays from time to time; only the waters whispered drowsily; and the trees the moonlight bathed stirred now and again, as if they dreamed of day. Sometimes a dog growled, or the night-jar flapped its wings as it passed by; and low earth-clinging vapours now began to wrap the fields, but slowly, as a tired-out mother wraps her child.

The sounds of quiet breathing rose from the almost invisible orchards and buildings, about which the people lay in the open air, trusting to the mildness of the night.

In Boryna's room as well, sleep and tranquillity prevailed, except for the *cree-cree-cree* of the cricket on the hearth, and Yagna's breaths, fluttering like a butterfly's wings.

It must have been at some time in the small hours (the



first cock was crowing already) that Boryna began to move, the moon at the same time shining through the window-panes, and pouring on to his face its cold though seething torrents of silvery splendour.

Sitting up in bed, and clearing his throat, he attempted to call out, but could utter no other sound than a gurgle.

Thus he sat for a time, looking round with a vacant stare, and fumbling with his fingers in the light of his coverlet, as though he thought to grasp that luminous stream of moonbeams that struck his eyes.

"Day has come. . . . It is time," he mumbled at last, standing erect upon the floor.

He looked out of the window, and, like a man awaking from a deep sleep, thought that it was day, that he had slept overmuch, and that some pressing work was awaiting him.

"I must get up, it is time," he repeated, crossing himself again and again, and beginning his morning prayers. Then he glanced round for his clothes. Not finding them, he forgot them quite, and, passing his hands over himself, made a feeble attempt at dressing. His prayer broke off in the saying, and he could only mutter a few incoherent fragments in a soundless voice.

His brain was vexed with vague thoughts of things to do, remembrances of things done, and, as it were, the echoes of what had gone on around him when he was lying ill. In evanescent flashes there came to his mind dim recollections, activities that had been indistinct as the furrows on reaped land, and now started up clear and sharp; they took shape in his brain, struggling to come forth, and every instant formed some fresh phantasm which vanished away ere he could grasp it, like rotten tissues that crumbled into dust; so that his mind was as restless as a wandering flame that finds nothing to feed upon, and strays perforce.

And thus, whatever he now did, he did out of mere habit, like a horse that has for years walked round, turning the beam of a threshing-machine, and when set at liberty still goes round.

He opened the window and looked out; he gazed into the store-room, poked the fire-place after much pondering—and then, just as he was, barefoot and in his shirt, walked out.

The door was ajar, the passage flooded with the rays of the moon. Curled up on the threshold, Lapa was sleeping. At the sound of a tread, he woke, growled, and, recognizing his master, followed him out.

Matthias halted outside the hut, scratched his ear, and strove hard to remember what that urgent piece of work that awaited him could be.

The dog was leaping up joyfully at his master, who patted him as of old, whilst staring bewilderedly about him.

It was bright, like day. The moon had now risen above the cabin, casting deep blue shadows on the white walls, and making the mill-pond waters shine like a mirror. Lipka was still as death, but a few birds were noisily fluttering in the thickets.

Something came to his mind on a sudden: he hurried to the yard. All the doors were wide open, and the men snoring in the shadow of the barn. He looked into the stables, patted the horses; they whinnied at his touch. Then he peered into the byre: the cows lay in a row, and only their rumps were visible in the light of the moon.

He then tried to drag a cart out of the shed; but a glittering plough hard by the sties drew off his attention, and he moved towards it . . . and ceased to think of it before he got there.

In the middle of the yard he stopped short and looked round on every side, for he thought someone had called him.

The well-sweep stood high in front of him, throwing a long shadow.

"What is it?" he asked, and paused for a reply.

The orchard, slashed with moonbeams, seemed to block his way; its silvered leaves were whispering to him.

"Who calls?" he asked, stumbling against a tree.

Lapa, following at his heels, uttered a whine. At the sound he stopped and drew a deep breath; then he said,



gaily: "Quite right, good dog! Aye, it is seed-time!"

And this idea too passed from his mind in an instant: everything slipped out of his memory, as dry sand creeps through the fingers.

Continually fresh thoughts kept him moving, puzzled, bewildered, and like a spindle that is turned round by the thread that runs out, though it turns in the same place.

"Aye, aye, it is seed-time," he repeated, and moved quickly to the part of the premises which adjoined the fields. There he saw before him that hayrick of bitter memory, burnt down last winter, and but just set up again.

He meant to pass by it, but started back on a sudden. In a flash he saw the past, which memory made present. He tore a stake from the fence; brandishing it in both hands like a pitchfork, he dashed forward with rage in his eyes, ready to smite and slay; but before his blow could be struck, the stake fell from his grasp, now weak and slack.

Beyond the rick, along the road that skirted the potato-field, there stretched a long strip of ploughed land. Here he stopped, and cast troubled glances round him.

The moon had gone through half her course, bathing the earth in misty beams; it lay covered with pearls of dew, and, as it were, silent in rapt attention.

Impenetrable depths of silence came down from the upper fields, and from where earth and sky met in the hazy distance; from the meadows rose up white vapours, crawling over the corn, enveloping it in its warm damp folds, as it rose.

The tall yellow-green rye-borders bent over the field-pathways, drooping under the weight of the ears, that hung down like the saffron-hued beaks of unfledged birds in their nests; the wheat stood upright boldly, as straight as so many pillars, lifting their glossy and dusky heads; the oats and barley, as yet in the blade, lay green as meadows, but silvered by the moonlight and blurred with dark veils of mist.

It was about the second cock-crow now, and the night far spent. The fields rested, lost in profound sleep, some-

times rustling quietly as it were with an echo of the day's toil and troubles, and sighing as a mother may sigh when she lays herself down to rest with her little ones.

Boryna knelt down immediately, and set to gathering earth in a fold of his shirt, like seed-corn in a sower's bag, and in such quantity that he could scarce rise. He made the sign of the cross, swept his arm round to try his reach, and began to sow.

Bent down beneath the burden, he went slowly, step by step, sowing the field with that semicircular sweep of his arm, like a priest's benediction.

Lapa followed him; and when some frightened bird rose from before his feet, he would run after it awhile, and then go back to his master.

In this charmed world of night and spring, Boryna, gazing straight before him, walked on through the patches of corn, like a spirit blessing every clod of earth, every ear of corn; sowing on, sowing ever.

At the furrows he stumbled; at the hollows he staggered, sometimes even fell. But of this he was unconscious—aware of nothing but the dull irresistible craving to sow the land.

Thus he walked on to the end of the field. When there was no earth remaining for him to throw, he took up more and sowed on. When his way was barred by trees and brambles, he would turn back.

He had walked a good distance. The birds' twitterings were no longer to be heard; the whole village had disappeared in the misty darkness, and the billowy sea of tawny cornfields surged all about him. There he stood, forlorn and lonely and lost—as a soul that is wandering away from this world.—And then, once more he came back towards the village, towards the ring within which the twittering of birds was again audible, and towards the circle of human activity, now stilled for a time: he, a waif thrown back to the shores of life and existence by those waves of the surging sea of corn!



So the time passed, and so he went on sowing indefatigably, stopping at times to rest his limbs a little. Then he would again take up his bootless toil and vain exertions.

Later, and near the close of the night, he worked more slowly, stopped oftener, forgot to gather the earth for his seed, and sowed empty-handed: as though he were now sowing his very being in those fields of his fathers—all the days he had lived, all that life he had received, and was now giving back (a sacred harvest) to the Everlasting Lord!

And in those last moments of his life there came to pass a very wonderful thing. The sky turned grey, like a shroud; the moon set; all light went out; the whole land was plunged in murky inextricable depths of sudden and utter darkness. And then a Something beyond all thought seemed to arise from . . . none knew where—and to walk in those shadows with footsteps so ponderous that they made the very earth to rock.

Then a long blast blew from the woods, with an ominous murmur.

The trees in the fields were shaking; the corn, the grass, waved shudderingly; from the trembling plots of land there came a low moan of dread:

“O Master! Master!”

The green ears of barley quivered convulsively, as if weeping, and bent to kiss his weary feet.

“O Master!” the rye-patches trilled, stopping his way, and shaking down a shower of dewy tears. Birds gave forth a melancholy cry. The wind sobbed over his head. The mist enveloped him in her dank dripping folds. And the voices sounded ever louder, ever more sadly, and always repeating:

“O Master! Master!”

At last he paid heed to them, and said, under his breath:

“Lo, here I am: what will ye, say?”

No answer came; but when he would have moved on farther, sowing with that tired empty hand, the earth cried out to him, in a mighty voice:

“Remain with us! Remain with us! Remain!”

And he stood in astonishment. All things seemed pressing forward against him. The grasses came crawling, the corn billowing towards him; the fields beset him round; the whole country-side rose up and fell upon him. Dismayed, he would have cried aloud; but his fast-closed throat let no voice pass. He tried to flee; his strength failed him quite. The ground caught his feet, the corn entangled them, the furrows tripped him up, the stubborn glebe balked his steps, the trees shook their boughs at him to stop his way. He was pricked by thistles, hurt by stones, chased by the angry wind, and led astray by the night and the many voices crying out from everywhere:

"Stay with us! Oh, stay!"

On a sudden he became motionless, and all things with him. His eyes, now growing dark in death, saw clear with a lightning flash. Heaven opened out before him—and there, seated on a throne of wheat-sheaves, the Everlasting Father stretched out His hands, and said to him mildly:

"Come unto Me, O human soul; O weary toiler, come thou unto Me!"

Boryna reeled at the words, and, stretching forth his hands (as at the Elevation):

"O Lord God, I thank Thee!" he cried, and fell prostrate on his face before that most holy Majesty.

So he fell, and so he died, in the hour of God's loving-kindness.

. . . . .  
Dawn was rising; and over him Lapa howled long and mournfully.

END OF PART III



PART IV  
SUMMER  
CHAPTER I

**T**HUS did Matthias Boryna die.

With dreadful yelps and howls, and leaps against the door to be let in, Lapa awoke the sleepers in the cabin, who were enjoying their Sunday rest; and then he pulled them by their clothes, and ran out a little, looking back again to see if they followed him, till Hanka took notice.

"Go, Yuzka, and see what that dog would have us do."

She ran out after him in good spirits, skipping along the road.

He led her to her father's body.

On beholding it, she uttered such awful shrieks that they all came out at once, and found him cold, rigid, lying on his face just as when he had passed away, his arms stretched out crosswise in a last fervent prayer.

Still attempting to revive him, they bore the body to the hut.

All their endeavours were fruitless: what lay before them was a corpse, and nothing more.

A bitter lamentation rose up: Hanka rent the air with cries; Yuzka cried not less wildly, and dashed her head against the wall; Vitek and the little ones wailed aloud, and Lapa howled and barked outside. Pete alone, who had been coming and going about the yard, glanced at the sun, and went back to his bed in the stable.

Matthias now lay on his couch, stiff and stark, as lifeless as a sun-dried earth-clod or a felled trunk. He still held a little sand fast in his clenched fist. In his wide-open eyes, gazing afar into some heavenly region, there was a look of wondering rapture.

Nevertheless, there emanated from that body an effluence

of mortality so sombre, so profoundly sad, that they had to cover it with a sheet.

His death was immediately known throughout the village; and barely had the sun appeared over its roofs, when visitors came pouring in one after another, raised the sheet, looked into his eyes, and knelt down to say a prayer for him. Others, stricken with awe at this example of God's dominion over human life, stood wringing their hands in mournful silence.

Meanwhile the mourners' lamentations continued resounding unceasingly.

And now Ambrose came, turned away the crowd outside, closed the cabin door, and, together with Yagustynka and Agata (the latter having crept in to pray beside the body), set about rendering the last services to the deceased, which he always did willingly, and in general with plenty of witticisms; but this time he felt somehow heavy at heart.

"So much for the happiness of any man!" he muttered, as he undressed the body. "Dame Crossbones, as often as she has a mind, will clutch you by the throat, slap you in the face; and ye, turning up your toes, are borne away to the 'Priests' Cow-byre'; and is there any able to resist her?"

Even Yagustynka was grieved, and said, in no merry mood: "Poor man! they neglected him so in this world that 'twas better for him to die!"

"Indeed? And who, then, did him any harm?"

"Nay, were they so very good to him?"

"And who on earth has all to his liking? Why, even a squire, even a king, must suffer trouble and pain."

"He had not to bear either hunger or cold: we can say no more."

"Ah, good Mother, what is hunger? The heart-ache gnaws far worse."

"True. I have felt it. And Yagna cut him to the heart: nor did his own children spare him."

"But," Agata put in, interrupting the prayers she was saying, "he had children that were good, and did him no wrong."

Yagustynka turned snappishly upon her. "Say your



prayers, you! ye were best. What? will she drone dirges for the dead man, and listen all the time to the talk?"

"Well, but if his children were bad, would they mourn for him so? Only hark to them!"

"Had he but left you so much, ye would move heaven and earth with your lamentations!"

Here Ambrose interfered. "Be quiet," he said; "here comes Yagna."

She rushed in, but stood transfixed in the middle of the room, unable to speak.

They were then attiring the body in a clean shirt.

"What! . . . gone?" she said at last, with eyes fixed on him. Fear was gripping at her throat and her heart; her blood ran cold and she could scarcely breathe.

"Did they not tell you?" Ambrose inquired.

"I was asleep at Mother's: Vitek came to call me but now.—Is he dead truly and indeed?" she asked suddenly, approaching him.

"Surely 'tis for a coffin, not for a wedding, that I am attiring him."

She could not make it out, and staggered up against the wall; she fancied herself in a deep sleep, the prey of some nightmare.

Several times she quitted the room, but always returned; to keep her eyes away from the body was impossible. Now and again she would start up to go out, and yet stayed on; at times she went out as far as the stile, and looked far across the fields with unseeing gaze; or she would seat herself outside, but close to the room and to Yuzka, who was weeping, tearing her hair, and for ever crying:

"Oh my father, my lost father! lost!"

There was great wailing and sobbing, not only in, but also around, the cabin. Of the mourners, Yagna alone, though quaking in every limb, and stirred to the inmost depths of her being, could not shed one tear, could not utter one cry. She only walked to and fro with eyes gloomily bright, with an expression of stern awe.

It was a good thing that Hanka presently recovered her-

self and, though tearful yet, was able to see to everything, and felt quite calm on the arrival of the blacksmith and his wife.

Magda wept; the smith asked for particulars, which Hanka gave him.

"'Tis well that the Lord Jesus has sent him so easy a death!"

"Poor man! Running out afield to flee Dame Cross-bones' embrace!"

"Yestereve I went to look at him; he was as quiet as usual."

"And did he not speak? Not a word?" the smith asked, wiping tearless eyes.

"Not a word. So I pulled the down covering over him, gave him to drink, and came away."

"What? and so he got up alone! Peradventure, then, he might not have died, had any been there to watch over him," said Magda, between her sobs.

"Yagna was sleeping at her mother's. She always does so, now the old dame is so very ill."

"It was to be!—And it has been!" said the blacksmith. "These three months and over he has been a-dying. Whoso cannot be healed, better let him die quickly. Let us thank the Lord God that he suffers no longer."

"Aye, and well ye know how much the physicians and medicines cost us in the first days . . . and all to no purpose."

"Ah!" Magda lamented; "how good a farmer he was! how able a man!"

"What grieves me is that Antek should not find him alive, when he comes back."

"He is no child, nor likely to weep on that account.—Rather bethink yourself of the funeral."

"True, true.—Oh, what a pity that Roch is away just now!"

"We can do without him. Be not troubled: I will see to all," the smith replied.

He showed a sorrowful face, but was evidently masking



some hidden thought as he set to help Ambrose to fold up the dead man's clothes. For a long time he ferreted in the store-room amongst hanks of spun wool and odds and ends; then he went up the ladder—for the boots which hung there, he said. The fellow panted as loud as a pair of bellows, pattered prayers for the dead man louder than Agata, and was continually recalling the good actions of the deceased. But his eyes were meanwhile wandering about the room, and his hands gliding about under the pillows, or groping in the straw of the mattress.

At length Yagustynka said tartly: "Are ye looking for aught in particular?"

"One cannot find, unless one seeks!" he answered. And then he began to search quite openly; nor did the arrival of Michael from the organist's, in hot haste for Ambrose, hinder him in the least.

"Come at once, Ambrose: four babies wait in church to be christened."

"Let them wait; I must first of all get him neat and tidy."

"Nay, ye had better go, Ambrose," said the smith, who wanted to get rid of him.

"What I have offered to do, I will do. I shall not soon lay out such another as he. Take my place in church, Michael," he added, turning to the lad, "and let the god-fathers and godmothers go round the altar with lighted tapers: they will drop you kopeks in plenty.—What!" disparagingly; "ye are to be an organist, yet cannot serve at a simple christening?"

Hanka now brought in Matthew, to measure Boryna for his coffin.

"Do not grudge him room in this last dwelling of his," said Ambrose, in a sad tone; "let the poor man have some comfort, at least after death!"

"Lord, Lord!" Yagustynka whispered; "when he lived, he had not enough with all his many acres; and now four boards will suffice him amply!"

Agata, interrupting her prayers, here faltered tearfully:

"He was a landowner, and shall be buried as such; but

some poor creatures know not under which hedge they are to die. . . . May light perpetual shine upon you! May——” And here she broke down again.

Matthew said nothing, but nodded, and after taking the measure, said a prayer and went out. Though it was Sunday, he set to work directly. All the necessary tools were in the hut, and some seasoned oaken planks that had long been in readiness lay upstairs. He had presently set up his workshop in the orchard, and was hard at work—and making Pete, who had been told to assist him, work hard too.

The day had dawned long ago, and the sun was shining with jocund burning rays. It had been quite hot ever since breakfast-time; all the fields and orchards were being slowly plunged in a vapour-bath of whitish simmering air.

In some places, the languishing trees stirred their leaves, as birds overwhelmed by heat might flutter their wings. The lull of the day of rest had pervaded all the village; nothing moved but the swallows darting over the pond, and the carts bearing people to church from some neighbouring hamlet, with clouds of dust in their wake. . . . Every now and then one of them stopped in front of Boryna's, where the disconsolate family were sitting, to greet them and sigh heavily, looking in through the open windows and door.

Ambrose made good speed, and hastened the preparations: soon the bed was out in the orchard, and the bedding spread on the hedge to air; and now he called upon Hanka to bring him juniper-berries to fumigate the mortuary chamber.

But just then she heard nothing. She had wiped the last tears from her eyes, and was looking down the road, in the hope that she might at any moment see her Antek.

But, as the hours passed, and he did not come, she wanted to send Pete to town for news of him.

“Nay,” objected Bylitsa, who had just come in from Veronka's hut; “he will bring no news and only tire the horse.”

“But they must know something at the police bureau.”



"No doubt; but it is closed on Sundays. Besides, they will tell you naught, if their palms be not greased."

"Alas!" she complained to her sister, "I can bear this no longer."

"Oh, he will yet be a thorn in your side," hissed the blacksmith, darting a glance at Yagna, who was sitting under the eaves. And, his fruitless search for the money having stirred his bile, he added spitefully: "His legs must be stiff with the irons he wore; how, then, can he make haste home?"

She replied nothing, and went to look out upon the road again.

As the Mass-bells were ringing, Ambrose made for the church after ordering Vitek to grease the dead man's boots well, for they had got so dry that they could not be put on him.

The smith, together with Matthew, went off to the village; and now there remained no one in the cabin but the women and Vitek, busily greasing the boots, softening them over the fire, and at times casting a look in the direction of Yuzka, whose sobs were growing fainter.

There was now no movement at all upon the road, the people being in church; nor was anything to be heard in Boryna's cabin but the voice of Agata within, saying the litany for the dead. It rose up like the chirruping of a bird, along with the volumes of juniper smoke, with which Yagustynka was perfuming the hut and the passage.

They heard the service begin. Audible in the noonday hush, the chants wafted from the church, and the sound of the organ came to them in high-pitched undulations, pleasant and remote.

Hanka could find no rest within doors, so she went to the stile, to get through her prayers there.

"Dead, dead, dead!" she thought, as the beads slipped slow through her fingers.—But she prayed with her lips only; her brain, her heart, were full of manifold puzzling thoughts, and not a few misgivings.

"Thirty-two acres. Also pastures. And a bit of forest. And the outhouses, and the live stock!" She sighed and cast a look of affection on the broad acres before her.

"If we could but pay them off, and keep all the land together!—And be just what his father has been!"

Pride and ambition filled her heart; she gazed sunwards, smiled fearlessly, and went on telling her beads, her bosom swelling with agreeable hopes.

"No, I will not give up even half the land. Half the cabin is mine, too. Nor shall the others get a single one of my milch-kine!"

She went on very long in this way, saying her prayers, flinging tearful glances over those lands, clad with sunshine, as if it were a tissue of gold, where the rye, in its growing luxuriance, waved its rusty-red drooping ears; where the darker barley-patches stood shining in the light, glossy and shimmering; where the bright green oats, thickly sprinkled with yellow-flowering weeds, stirred and quivered in the parching heat; where over the blossoming clover that lay spread out on the hill-slope, like a blood-red kerchief, a great bird was hovering, balanced on its outstretched wings, and where the broad beans stood, with their thousands of snowy flowers, keeping watch and ward over the young potato-plants, and a few plots of flax in the hollows gleamed blue with delicate flowers—childlike eyes that seemed blinking in the glare.

All was so wondrously beautiful! The sun grew hotter and hotter meanwhile; and the warm breeze, laden with the scents of the blossoms that glowed in countless numbers, breathed from the fields with delicious life-giving might, dilating the souls of men.

"O native soil, O holy soil, most holy!" she said, bending down to kiss it.

She heard the church-bells tinkling, twittering in the air.

"O my dear Jesus! all's for Thee—yea, all things in the world!" she murmured fervently, and again betook herself to prayer.

But close to her she heard a rustling noise, and looked



around her cautiously. Beneath the cherry-trees, leaning against the trellised fence, Yagna stood, absorbed in unpleasant thought.

"What, never one moment of peace!" Hanka complained; for, at the sight of her, sharp memories arose—sharp as stinging nettles.

"Yes, there's the donation made to her. 'Tis a fact! Aye, six whole acres! Oh, that thief!" She turned her back upon her, but could not take up her prayers again. Like hounds that not only barked but bit deep, the wrongs and outrages of former days came back and beset her.

Noon had passed; the shrunken shadows were beginning to creep out once more from under the trees and the houses. In the corn which bent slightly towards the sunbeams, the grasshoppers played their faint shrill music, a beetle hummed by at intervals, or a quail piped. And the weather was all the time growing more and more intolerably hot.

High Mass was now ended, and the women came out of church to take off their shoes by the pond, and there was no more solitude for Hanka; the roads swarmed so with men and wagons that she went home.

Boryna was at last lying in state.

In the middle of the room he lay, on a wide bench, with a cloth over it and burning tapers around. He had been washed, combed, and clean-shaved, but his cheek bore a deep gash from Ambrose's razor, which a bit of paper concealed. He was arrayed in his very best clothes: the white capote that had been made for his wedding with Yagna, striped breeches, and all but quite new boots. In his overworked withered hands he held the image of Our Lady of Chenstohova.

A large barrel of water stood by to keep the air cool; and upon earthenware tiles there lay juniper-berries, smouldering and exhaling their aromatic smoke, that filled the whole cabin with a bluish haze, through which the awful majesty of death was mistily visible.

So lay, then, in silent state, the body of Matthias Boryna, an upright and an able man, a thorough Christian, a farmer

and the son and descendant of farmers—the foremost man in Lipka.

He was in readiness, about to depart, to bid farewell to his kinsfolk and all that knew him, and set out on the Great Journey!

His soul had already passed before the Judgment-seat: it was but his worn-out body, the empty shell his soul had once inhabited, that lay there, feebly smiling, amongst lights and smoke-wreaths and unceasing prayers.

In came the people then, in an interminable procession, sighing, beating their breasts, musing profoundly, or weeping; and the sounds of their stifled sobs and faint whispers was like the pattering of autumnal rain. They came and went without end: all Lipka came, rich and poor, young and old, men and women.

In spite of the magnificent weather, his death made the whole village gloomy and wretched; everyone was in deep sadness, everyone greatly given to moralize over “the unhappy fate of mortal man.”

Many of the dead man’s friends lingered about the hut, and some of the goodwives remained to attempt consoling Hanka and Magda and Yuzka in words of homely comfort, condoling and weeping heartily along with them.

To Yagna nobody said one word. Though indeed she cared little for their pity, she felt nevertheless pained at being so pointedly left alone; so she went out into the garden, where she sat listening to Matthew at work hammering the coffin.

“That creature!” the Voyt’s wife hissed after her. “To dare show her face at all!”

“Oh, let her be!” said another; “it is no time now to think of her misdeeds.”

“Aye, leave them to the Lord Jesus, who will judge them hereafter,” Hanka added mercifully.

“And for the bitter things ye say, the Voyt will reward her abundantly,” the smith remarked, with a sneer, and went away, the miller having sent for him. Luckily; for



the goodwife was swelling with rage like a turkey, and ready to fly out at him.

He broke into a croaking laugh, and hurried off. The others lingered on to talk, but the talk flagged, partly through their sorrow, partly on account of the intense heat. It was indeed so hot that all the flowers and plants were fading, and the walls shedding tears of resin.

Of a sudden a bellow, long-drawn and plaintive, was heard, and a peasant, driving a cow, passed by on the farther side of the pond.

He pulled her hard by the rope, while they looked on in dull silence.

"Taking her to the priest's bull, I suppose," Yagustynka said; but no one took any interest in her remark.

The bells rang for Vespers and they took leave of Hanka, who then sent Vitek to ask the smith to go with her and arrange with the priest for the funeral expenses. He presently returned, saying that the smith was in conference with the Squire and the miller, and taking afternoon tea together; his stallions were outside, pawing the ground in the shade.

"He with the Squire!—How strange!" But she could not wait, and accompanied by Magda, dressed in her best, she went to the priest's house.

He was in the farm-yard, and sent them word he would see them there.

He sat in the shade, close to the fence. In the middle of the yard, not far from a rather fine cow that a peasant held fast with a rope, a powerful dappled bull was turning round and round her, kept back with difficulty by the priest's farm-servant, pulling at the end of his chain.

"Valek! Just wait a little: he is not ready yet," the priest called out. Then, mopping his bald head, he called the women to him, and asked about Boryna's death, and consoled and comforted them with the greatest kindness. But when they inquired about the funeral fees, he stopped them short, saying impatiently:

"Of those things later. I am no extortioner. Matthias

was the biggest farmer in the village; he cannot have a mean funeral. No, I tell you, he cannot," he repeated fiercely, as was his way.

They embraced his feet, not venturing to insist.

"Ah!" he cried suddenly. "You little blackguards! I'll give it you! Look at them, those bad boys!" He was addressing the organist's sons, peeping surreptitiously over the hedge.—"Well, and what think ye of my bull, hey?"

"A splendid beast!" Hanka replied. "Finer than the miller's."

"The two differ as much as a bull differs from a wagon! Only look at him!" And he came nearer with them, and patted the flanks of the animal, that now was approaching closer to the cow.

"Oh, what a neck! what a back! what a splendid chest! what a dewlap!" he cried, breathless with enthusiasm. "Why, 'tis no bull, 'tis a bison!"

"Indeed, I never saw so fine a one."

"No, ye never did. It is a thoroughbred Hoilander. Cost me three hundred roubles."

"So great a sum as that?" they exclaimed in amazement.

"Not one kopek less. Valek, let him go . . . but cautiously now; the cow is but a puny thing.—She will be mated in an instant. . . . Aye, the bull is exceeding dear. But then the Lipka folk—if they want to have a breed of first-rate kine, will have to pay not less than one rouble, and ten kopeks for my man besides!—The miller is wroth, but I was disgusted with the miserable beasts his bull is accountable for.—Now then, run away!" he said, noticing that the women averted their faces with shame. As they went, he called after them: "To-morrow we bring the body to the church!" and set to helping the peasant, who had much ado to hold his cow.

"You'll very soon thank me for a calf such as you did never yet see in your life.—Valek, take him away to rest awhile. Though indeed he can scarcely be in need of any rest at all . . . Such a trifle!" he boasted.

The women had repaired to the organist's, because they



had to make a separate agreement with him. And as they had to take coffee there, and talk for some time afterwards, the cattle were coming home when they returned to their huts.

Mr. Yacek puffed at his pipe, standing in the porch with Matthew, whom he tried to engage to build Staho's hut, but who seemed hardly pleased at the offer, and would say nothing definitive.

"As to cutting up the timber, that's no great affair; but as to building the hut . . . Do I know? I have enough of the country and may be going somewhere far away.—No, I cannot say for sure." As he spoke thus, he glanced at Yagna, who was milking her cow outside the byre.

"Well, well, I shall finish the coffin to-morrow morning, and then we may talk the matter over," he concluded, and hurried away.

Mr. Yacek, entering the room where Boryna lay, prayed for him long and fervently, wiping away many a tear. He said to Hanka afterwards: "May his sons but resemble him! He was a good man, a true Pole; was with us in the insurrection; came of his own accord, and did not spare his blows: I have seen him in action. Alas! it is through us he has perished! . . . There's a curse upon us," he added, as if speaking to himself. Though Hanka could not make out well all he said, yet his words were so full of kindness that she fell at his feet and embraced them out of gratitude.

"Never do that!" he exclaimed angrily. "What am I more than one amongst you?"

Once more he cast a look at Boryna, lit his pipe at the taper, and left the place, without answering the salutations of the blacksmith, just then entering the passage.

"What, so proud to-day?" the smith cried; but as he was in good spirits this vexed him but little. Seating himself by his wife's side, he talked to her very low:

"You must know, Magda, that the Squire is seeking to come to terms with our village—and looks for me to help him. Of course I shall make a good thing of it. But mum! not a whisper of this, wife of mine: 'tis a big affair."

And he went off to the tavern, inviting men to come there and confer with him.

Along the western horizon the sky looked like a sheet of rusted iron, but a few clouds still glowed above in golden light.

When all the evening duties had been done, the people assembled around the dead body. More and more tapers were lit about Boryna's head; Ambrose snuffed the wicks again and again, and chanted out of a book; and all present joined in the responses, weeping and lamenting one after another.

The neighbours came too, but, as it was very close within, stayed outside, droning out the long sorrowful notes of the Litany as they knelt.

This continued till late at night, when they retired, leaving only Ambrose and Agata to watch the body till morning.

This they did, at first chanting in a loud voice. But when all noise and movement around had ceased, they felt drowsy, and even Lapa, coming in and licking the grease off his master's boots, failed to wake them up.

About midnight, all became extremely dark, not a single star shone. Withal, there was a deep dead stillness, unbroken save by the faint whispering of a tree, or some eerie far-off sound—neither a shout, nor a crash, nor a call—remote and fading away in the distance.

No house in Lipka had any light at all now, save Boryna's, with the pallid illumination of the tapers, and the dead body just visible in the yellow flames, only blurred by the smoke of the perfumes, and seen as in a cloud of bluish fog. But Ambrose and Agata, with their heads pressed against the body, were both sound asleep and snoring loud.

The short summer night was soon over, as if hurrying to depart before the first cock-crow. One after another, all the tapers went out except the largest, which still sent up its long waving flame, like a blade of gold.

At last the grey mist-clad dawn looked into the room and into Boryna's face, who seemed somehow to have awaked from his heavy sleep, and to be listening to the first



twitterings of the nestling birds, and through discoloured lids eyeing the still remote daybreak.

Now the mill-pond sighed, with drowsy undulations; now the forest began to loom out darkly, looking like a range of black earth-hugging clouds, as the fading night grew phosphorescent, and the trees scattered here and there stood out distinct like tufts of swarthy plumes on the brightening sky-line, while the first morning breeze sprang up, playing with the orchard trees and murmuring in the ears of the sleepers outside the huts.

Few, however, opened their eyes as yet, being somewhat languid, as is usual after Sunday or a fair.

Then came the day, misty before sunrise, but with the lark chanting his matins, the waters bubbling their joyful carol, the corn giving forth its melodious many-sounding voices; and presently with the plaintive bleating of the sheep, the screaming of the geese, human calls resounding, gates creaking, horses neighing, and all the bustle and movement of those rising to their daily work. But everything was still and quiet yet in Boryna's hut.

They were sleeping, overcome by the grief that had wrung their hearts so sorely.

In came the wind through open windows and doors, whistling and blowing the old man's hair about, and tossing the flame of the last taper in every direction.

And he lay still as a stone, no longer ready to rush to work himself, nor to urge others to toil: deaf to every call now for evermore!

The wind was rising higher, streaming through the orchard with great force, making the trees shake and rustle and sway and toss, and seem peeping in through the windows at Boryna's ashen face. So did the tall slender hollyhocks, bending and bowing at the windows, not unlike red-cheeked country lasses. Now and then a bee from the Manor hives looked in, or a butterfly, glancing in the light; a swallow would dart in and out with a hesitating twitter; and flies and cockchafers, and every kind of living creatures came likewise: so that the room was filled with a quiet buzz and

drone and whirring hum—the voices of all these things, repeating:

“Dead—dead—he is dead!”

The sun rose—a huge red-hot globe, stilling all those voices; and then it suddenly veiled its glorious all-powerful and life-giving face, now hidden behind dense-volumed vapours.

The world grew grey; in a minute it began to rain abundantly in warm tiny drops, and soon their fall was heard through every field and orchard, pattering continually.

The roads cooled and exhaled the peculiar smell of rain; the birds sang loud and lustily to welcome it; the world was bathed in its greyish tremulous spray; and the thirsty corn-fields, and the shrivelling leaves, and the trees, and the rills with their dry parched throats, and the baked clods of earth—all drank deep and heartily, uttering, as it were, a silent thanksgiving.

“Thanks, Brother Rain! Thanks, Sister Cloud! We all thank you!”

Hanka, who slept by the open window, was waked first by the rain driving in her face, and ran at once to the stable.

“Up, Pete! the rain has come.—Run and heap the clover in cocks—quick, or it will mowburn and rot!—And you, Vitek, lazy boy! drive our kine afield.—All the other folk’s kine are out by now.”—As she spoke, she let the geese out of the fowl-house, and they hastened to splash joyfully in the pools of water.

While she was thus engaged, the smith came, and they settled together what would have to be purchased in town for the funeral feast next day. He took the money; but on starting in his britzka, he called her and whispered:

“Hanka, let me have one-half, and I’ll never breathe a word about your robbing the old man!”

She flushed red as a beet-root, and cried out in a passion:

“Say what ye will, and to the whole world!—Look at that man! He thinks that all are like himself!”

He glared at her, pulled at his moustache, and drove off.



Hanka was very busy indeed, and her voice was soon heard giving orders everywhere.

Two fresh tapers having been lit at Boryna's side, a sheet was spread over the body. Agata went on praying, and every now and then putting more juniper-berries on the hot coals.

After breakfast, Yagna came from her mother's, but was so frightened of the dead man that she never went in, and only wandered outside, watching Matthew as he worked at the coffin. He had done hammering now, and was just painting a white cross upon the top, when he saw her at the stable-door, silent and looking upon the black coffin-lid with a great sinking at heart.

"Yagna!" he whispered compassionately, "you're a widow now—a widow!"

"Yes, yes, I am!" she returned in a sad subdued voice.

He felt much pity for her; so worn, and pale, and unhappy-looking, and like a child that has been ill-used.

"'Tis the common lot!" he told her, gravely.

"A widow! a widow!" she repeated. Tears welled up to her dark-blue eyes; a deep sigh burst from her bosom. She ran out into the rain and wept there so plentifully that Hanka came to bring her within doors.

"Of what use is weeping? We too have much to bear. But to you, forlorn one, it is in truth a still greater blow," she said kindly.

Yagustynka, always the same, here observed:

"Weep away! But ere the year be out, I'll sing you such a new wedding-song as will make you dance like mad."

"Such jests are ill-timed now!" Hanka said reproachfully.

"I say true; 'tis no jest! Why, is she not wealthy and lovely and young? She will need a stout stick to keep the men away from her!"

Hanka, going out to take the pigs their wash, looked along the road.

"What," she thought with misgiving, "can the matter be?"

He was to be set free on Saturday: it is Monday now, and there's no news of him!"

But she had no time for brooding. Her assistance was wanted to make the rest of the hay and all the clover just mown into cocks, for the rain never left off, and was falling in torrents.

In the evening, the priest came with the organist and the Confraternity, bearing lighted tapers, to lay Boryna in his coffin. Matthew nailed it down, the priest recited some prayers, sprinkled holy water over it, and it was taken to church in procession, Ambrose tolling the funeral bell the while.

How empty, how fearfully quiet the hut seemed on their return! Yuzka quite broke down. Hanka said:

"He was just like a corpse for so many a day, yet we felt there was a master amongst us!"

"But Antek will come," Yagustynka assured her, "and there will then be another master!"

"Would it were soon!" she sighed.

But as in this rainy weather there was a great deal of work to do, she dashed her tears away. "Come, good people!" she cried. "Should the greatest man in the world die, he is like a stone in the depths of the sea—never to be fished up again; and the land will not wait, and we must toil and till it."

Then she took them all to earth up the potato-plants, Yuzka alone staying at home to take care of the babies, and because the sorrow, which she had not yet got over, had made her ill. Lapa was constantly by her side, watching over her, and also Vitek's stork, that stood on one leg in the porch, as if on guard.

When the downpour, heavy and warm as it was, had lasted for some time, the birds ceased from singing, and all the beasts listened in silence to the purl and gurgle and drumming of the torrential rain. Only the geese made a riotous noise, swimming merrily about in the frothy pools.

"To-morrow we shall surely have fine weather," people said, on coming back from the fields, seeing the sun shine



bright at evening, and peer out with his fiery eye over the country-side.

"Would it might still rain to-morrow! it will be worth much gold to us!"

"Aye, our potatoes were all but destroyed."

"And how dried up the oats were!"

"Things will look better now."

"If it could but rain for three days running!"

And so on.

It had kept pouring steadily till nightfall, and the peasants had the pleasure of standing outside their huts to breathe the cool and deliciously fragrant air. Meanwhile the Gulbas lads were urging all the boys and girls to sally forth and kindle the "Sobotki"<sup>1</sup> fires on a neighbouring eminence. But the weather was far from pleasant, and only a few bonfires gleamed that evening along the skirts of the forest.

Vitek wished very much for Yuzka to go with him to the Sobotki. But she said: "No, I will not. What care I for amusements now . . . or for anything in the world?"

Still he pressed her to go. "We will only light a bonfire, leap over it . . . and come home again."

"No! And you too shall stay at home: else Hanka shall know of it," she said, threatening him.

He went notwithstanding—and came back too late for supper, famished, and most shockingly bespattered with mud; for the rain had been falling all the time. Indeed, it only gave over the next day, at the time of the funeral service.

Even then the weather was cloudy and foggy, setting off still better the bright green of the fields, threaded with silver brooklets everywhere. It was fresh, cool, pleasant: the lands, all drenched and soaked, seemed fermenting with intense life.

A votive Requiem Mass was celebrated by the parish priest, who afterwards, in company with his Reverence of

<sup>1</sup> The "Sobotki" correspond to the St. John's Eve fires.—*Translator's Note.*

Slupia, and the organist, seated in pews on either side of the sanctuary, chanted the *Officium Defunctorum* in Latin. High on a catafalque lay Boryna, amid a grove of burning tapers. Around him the whole village knelt humbly, praying and giving ear to the long-drawn, melancholy dirge, that now sounded like a cry of terror, making their flesh creep and wringing their hearts; now gave out subdued murmuring syllables, low thrilling moans, that caused the tears to start unwilling; and now again would soar on high in unearthly rapture, like the hymns of angels in everlasting bliss; and the hearers would wipe away their tears, or burst into uncontrollable fits of weeping.

This lasted a full hour. At last Ambrose took the tapers out of their sockets to distribute them amongst the congregation; and the priest, having prayed before the body, gone round it, swinging his silver thurible until all the air around was blue with incense-smoke, and sprinkled it with holy water, walked forward to the door, the cross preceding him.

Then was there within the church a confused din of cries and wailing and sobbing, as several husbandmen of the highest standing, shouldering the coffin, bore it to the cart outside, the basketwork of which was crammed with straw. Yagustynka (furtively, lest the priests should see and prevent this superstitious act) thrust under it a big loaf, wrapped up in clean linen.

The dismal knell burst forth, the black banners were raised and the lights flared and flickered. Staho having lifted the cross, the two priests intoned:

*"Miserere mei, Deus . . ."*

The dread strains, the chant of death—the dirge of infinite sorrow—began to sob forth, and they wended their way towards the burying-ground.

In front of the procession, the black flag bearing the skull and crossbones, fluttered like a bird of horror: following in its wake came the silver cross, a long line of taper-bearers, and the priests, arrayed in black copes.

Then appeared the coffin, high in view, and the loudly



lamenting mourners, and all the village in the rear, walking in sad dreary silence. Even the sick and the crippled had come.

The grey clouds hung low in the sky, almost resting on the tops of the poplars, and motionless, as if intent on the chants that were sung. When a breeze arose, the trees shed their tears over the coffin, while the corn in the fields bent low as though to salute their master, leaving them for ever.

Floating through the air with the voices of the groaning bells, the dirge rolled a stillness as of death on the hearts of the listeners; while the mourners wailed, and the banners flapped, and the cart-wheels creaked—and the lark sang, far away in the fields.

And once again the *Miserere* resounded, with a magical effect on the feelings of those present.

Their hearts were as dying within them; their eyes strayed over the land and up to the grey sky, begging for mercy. Their faces had grown pale with the strain on their emotions; trembling had taken hold of them; and more than one whispered his prayers out of livid lips, with fervent sighs and beatings of the breast, and hearty repentance of sin. And over them all loomed that heavy sense of irreparable loss, and a feeling of immense woe, bringing forth most searching desolating thoughts, so that they could not but give way and mourn aloud.

They mused on the inevitable fate of man; on the fruitlessness of all his endeavours; on the utter vanity of his life, his joys, his possessions, his hopes—all mere smoke, dust, illusion, nothingness!—on his folly in setting himself above any creature whatsoever—he that is a mere whiff of wind that comes none knows whence, blows none knows why, goes none knows whither; or the impossibility—were a man lord of the whole world, and enjoying all imaginable pleasures—of avoiding death: and wherefore, then, doth the soul of man drag with it this torpid body? To what purpose doth man live?

Such were the meditations of the people, as they walked in procession, gazing around upon the verdant fields with

looks of sorrow unutterable, faces set hard and souls shuddering within them.

But nevertheless, they knew well that their refuge—their sole refuge—was in the infinite goodness and mercy of the Lord.

*"Secundum magnam misericordiam tuam!" . . .*

The mysterious Latin words fell upon their hearts like clods of frost-baked earth; and as they walked on, they bowed their heads instinctively to the sounds, as men must bow to the inexorable scythe of death. Now they felt absolutely resigned to all that might come—as indifferent as those rocks they saw cropping out of the fields close by them, in their hard grey strength; or the fallows and flowery meadows, and the mighty trees which may at any time be blasted by the thunderbolt, and yet which raise their heads to Heaven boldly, with a silent song of gladsome life!

Thus they traversed all the village, each one so lost in serious thoughts that he felt as if alone in a boundless desert, and seeing with his mind's eye all his forefathers borne to the churchyard, visible through the great poplar trunks.

And now, to the dreary tolling of the bells, it came in full sight, rising out of the corn with its clumps of trees, its crosses and its graves, opening before them that terrible insatiable abyss into which all the generations were slowly dropping. Peering through the air, dim with rain, they fancied they could see coffins borne from every hut, funeral trains crawling along every road, and everybody weeping, lamenting, sobbing for the loss of some dear one, till the world was full of mourning, and drowned in bitter tears.

They were already turning off to the churchyard lane, when the Squire came up with them, got down from his carriage, and accompanied the coffin on foot—a thing of some difficulty, because the road was narrow, and planted thickly with birch-trees on either side of the surrounding cornfields.

When the priests had done chanting, Dominikova, who



was led by Yagna, and walked bent down, almost blind, struck up as well as she could the psalm: "He that dwelleth . . .," which they all sang with great fervour, relieving their depressed spirits with this declaration of unbounded trust in God.

And thus they entered the burial-ground.

The foremost husbandman now carried the coffin, the Squire himself lending a hand to hold it up as they went along the yellow pathway, past grass and crosses and graves, till beyond the chapel they came to the tomb just dug amongst hazel-trees and elder-bushes.

At the sight, the wailing broke forth again, and still louder. The tomb was surrounded with banners and lights, and the people thronged with sinking hearts to gaze into that empty pit of sand.

Now the priest mounted a heap of sand thrown up, and he turned round and lifted up his voice, saying to the people:

"Christian folk and men of Lipka!"

Every sound was instantly hushed, save the distant tolling of the bells, and the sobbing of Yuzka, who had put her arms round her father's coffin and held it embraced.

The priest took snuff, wiped the tears from his eyes, and spoke thus:

"Brethren, who is it ye are burying this day? who, I ask?"

"Matthias Boryna, ye will answer."

"And I will tell you, it is also your foremost husbandman, and an honest man, and a true son of the Church, that ye are now burying."

"I, who have known him this many a year, can testify how exemplary and religious his life was, how regularly he confessed and went to Communion, and how he helped the poor."

"How he helped the poor, I say," the priest repeated with emphasis, and stopping to draw a long breath.

As he paused, the crying broke out again more loudly. And now he resumed in a sad voice:

"Poor Matthias! And he is with us no longer!"

"Gone!—Taken by death, that wolf that chooses for him-

self the goodliest ram in the flock—in broad day, unhindered by any.

“Like the lightning that strikes a lofty tree and cleaves it in twain, so the cruel hand of death has struck him down.

“But, as Holy Scripture saith, he has not died altogether.

“For behold him, a wanderer from this earth, standing at the gate of Paradise, and knocking, and crying pitifully to be let in, till at last Saint Peter asks him:

“‘Who, then, art thou, and what wouldst thou have?’

“‘I am Boryna of Lipka; and I pray God in His mercy . . .’

“‘What! have thy brethren tormented thee so that thou couldst live no longer?’

“‘I will tell thee all, Saint Peter,’ quoth Matthias; ‘but prithee set the gate ajar, that I may warm me a little in the heat of God’s mercy, for I am icy cold after my sojourn upon earth.’

“So Saint Peter set the gate ajar, but did not let him enter yet, saying:

“‘Now speak the truth to me, for there is none whom lies can deceive here.—Speak hardily, good soul, and say wherefor thou hast left this earth.’

“Then did Matthias drop down on his knees; for he heard the Angels singing, and the little bells ringing, as during Mass at the Elevation; and answered with tears:

“‘I shall speak the truth, even as in confession. Lo, I could not stay upon earth any more. Men are there like wolves to one another, and quarrels are rife, and dissensions, and sins against our Lord.

“‘They are not men, Saint Peter, not human creatures, but mad dogs, as it were. . . . Behold, they are so evil that I cannot say all the evil they do. . . .’

“‘Gone is obedience, gone is honesty, gone is all mercy as well! The brother rises up against his brother, and the child against his father, and the wife against her husband, and the serving-man against his master. They respect nothing any more—neither old age, nor dignity of station, nor even the very priesthood itself.



"The Evil One now reigns in every heart; under his rule lasciviousness and drunkenness and spite now flourish daily more and more.

"Knaves, ridden by knaves whom knaves drive: such are they all!

"Trickery is everywhere, and fraud, and cruel oppression, and such thieving! Set but down what ye hold in your hand, they will snap it up at once!

"They will graze their beasts, or trample down the grass, on your very best meadow.

"If you possess but a strip of land, they will take it and plough it for their own!

"Let but a fowl run forth from your garden: they'll instantly seize it!

"All they do is to swill vodka, commit uncleanness, and neglect God's service. They are heathens, Christ-murderers, and the Jews their accomplices are scores of times more honest and God-fearing than they."

"Here Saint Peter interrupted him: 'Oh, is it thus in your parish of Lipka?'

"'Tis no better elsewhere perchance, but nowhere is it worse.'

"Then Saint Peter smote his hands together, and his eyes flashed. And, stretching down his fist towards the earth, he said:

"Men of Lipka, are ye then such? Such loathsome wretches, heathens worse even than Germans? Ye possess goodly fields, a fertile soil, pastures and meadow-lands, and also portions of the forest: and 'tis thus that ye demean yourselves? O knaves that ye are, waxed fat with too much bread!—Most surely will I tell our Lord of your misdeeds, and He will henceforth keep a tighter hand upon you!"

"Matthias, good man as he was, tried hard to plead for his people; but Saint Peter grew wroth, and cried out, stamping his foot:

"Say not one word in their favour: they are villains, all of them! This one thing do I tell thee: let those sons of

Judas repent and do penance ere three weeks are past . . . or if not, I will afflict them bitterly, with hunger, and fire, and sickness; and the scoundrels shall remember me well!"

The priest went on preaching in the same unsparing fashion, and dealing out menaces of God's anger against them, with such effect that the whole congregation burst into sobs of contrition, and beat their breasts in token of repentance.

Then, after a breathing-space, he again spoke of the deceased, and pointed out how he had fallen for their sakes. And he wound up with an appeal to them all to live in concord and avoid sin, since no one knew whose turn it would be next to stand before God's awful judgment-seat.

Even the Squire was seen to brush away a tear.

The priest went off with him, when the funeral came to a close. And as the coffin descended with a thud into the grave, and the sand began to stream down upon it with a hollow rumbling, there arose such a tempest of cries, such a din of tumultuous lamentations, as might well have softened the hardest heart.

Yuzka wept clamorously, and Magda, and Hanka, and all the relations, near or distant, and even many that were not related at all. But not less loud than the loudest rang the shrieks of Yagna, who felt something clutch and tear at her heart, and made her as one beside herself.

"Yes, yes! She is bellowing now: yet what pranks she used to play upon her husband!" someone muttered aside; and Ploshkova, wiping her eyes, remarked:

"She would fain find grace in their eyes, and not be expelled from the cabin."

"Does she think them such fools that they can be cozened so?" was the outspoken comment of the organist's wife.

Yagna was completely unmindful of them all. Stretched out on a mound of sand, she lay crying wildly, with a feeling as if it were she herself upon whom those heavy reverberating torrents of earth were now pouring down, for whom the bells were tolling so mournfully, and over whom the people were so sorrowfully lamenting.



They now began to disperse: some, as they went, stopping to kneel and pray for some dear departed, others wandering about the tombs in dreary meditation, and others again lingering here and there, as they saw Hanka and the smith giving invitations to the customary funeral feast.

The earth was now beaten down over the grave; a black cross had been stuck in; and all went to the cabin with the mourners in several groups, talking low, condoling with them, and at times shedding tears.

The cabin was ready for them, with tables and settles ranged along the walls; and the company, when seated, was offered bread and vodka.

They drank at first with quiet decorum, and broke a little bread. The organist read suitable prayers, and a litany was sung for the deceased, with pauses when the blacksmith went round with drinks, and Yagustynka with more bread.

The women gathered in the other apartment with Hanka, and took tea and sweet cakes; and, the organist's wife leading off, they sang strains so plaintive and piercing that hens about the orchard began to cackle. Thus did the company eat, drink, and weep to the honoured memory of him who had died, and sing pious hymns for his soul, as befitted such an occasion and such a man.

Hanka grudged neither food nor drink, and generously pressed them all to partake. When, at noon, many of them expected to depart, a dish of *kluski* boiled in milk was served, followed by broiled meat with cabbage and pease.

"Other folk," Boleslaus' wife whispered, "have not such dainties even at their weddings."

"True; but what a goodly inheritance he leaves them!"

"And no doubt a large hoard of ready money."

"The blacksmith talked of its having been in the cabin—and vanished somewhere."

"Aye, he complains, but knows full well where he has hidden it."

The organist, who by this time was somewhat flustered, now stood up, and, glass in hand, set to extolling the late

Boryna in such high-flown terms and such a wealth of Latin quotations that, little as they understood, they wept copiously, as they did at a sermon hard to make out.

The noise increased, the faces grew flushed, the glasses clinked in fine style: some were groping for these with one hand and, with the other arm round their neighbour's neck, babbled and stammered pitiably. Some still attempted to keep up the sad tone due to such an occasion; but no one paid any heed to them. Each turned to the companions he preferred, talking with them most affectionately, and drinking to them again and again.

Ambrose alone was that day unlike his usual self. He had indeed drunk as much as any, nay, perhaps more, having taken all that he possibly could get; but he sat moping in a corner now, wiping his eyes and sighing heavily.

Some of them endeavoured to put him in a gay humour.

"Draw me not out, I am in no mood," he growled. "I am soon going to die. To die! Over me there will be only the dogs to whine; or perhaps an old woman may clink a broken pot for me," he mumbled, whimpering.

"Yea, I was at Matthias' christening, and made merry at his first wedding, and buried his father. Oh, well I remember that day! O Lord! And how many others I have laid in their graves, and sounded their funeral knell. Now 'tis time for me to go!"

And getting up suddenly, he went out into the orchard. Vitek afterwards said that the old man had sat down behind the cabin and wept for ever so long.

But he was not one to trouble much about. Besides, just as twilight was at hand, the priest, accompanied by the Squire, came in unexpectedly.

His Reverence consoled the orphans, patted the childrens' heads, and drank some tea, made for him by Yuzka; while the Squire, after some words exchanged with various people, took a glass which the smith offered him, drank to them all, and said to Hanka:

"If anyone has cause to regret Matthias, it is surely I. Were he living now, I might come to an agreement with



Lipka. And perchance," he added in a louder tone, glancing round, "I might even agree to all your demands. But with whom am I to make terms? With the Commissioner<sup>1</sup> I can have naught to do, and there is no man amongst you now who can represent Lipka."

They listened with deep attention, weighing every one of his words.

He talked on for some time, and put a few questions; but he might have spoken to a wall with as much effect. No one thought of letting his tongue run freely, or so much as opening his mouth.

They only nodded and scratched their heads, and looked at one another. . . . At length, seeing that he could not break down that barrier of suspicious caution, he went out along with the priest, and all the visitors saw him to the gate.

It was only afterwards that their surprise and bewilderment found tongue.

"Well, well! The Squire himself coming to a peasant's burial!"

"He fawns on us; therefore he has need of us," Ploshka said.

Klemba took his part. "Wherefore should he not have come as a friend?"

"Years have brought you no wisdom. When did ever a Squire come to the peasants as a friend? Say when!"

"Since he seeks an agreement, there must be something kept back."

"Only this: that he needs it more than we do."

"And that we are able to hold off!" cried Sikora, who was tipsy.

"Ye may be able: not all of us are!" angrily exclaimed Gregory, the Voyt's brother.

They began to quarrel, each man airing his own view.

"Let him give up both timber and forest-land, and then we'll come to terms."

<sup>1</sup>The representative of the Russian Government.—*Translator's Note.*

"We need not do so at all. There will be a sentence, and all will be ours by law."

"Mother of dogs! let him go a-begging; 'twill serve him right!"

"Because the Jews have got hold of him, lo, he comes whining to us peasants for help!"

"And once his only cry was: 'You peasant! get out of my way, or 'ware my horse-whip!'"

Here some one quite drunk cried out: "Never trust him, I tell you; he and his likes only plot the ruin of us peasants."

Then the blacksmith shouted: "Farmers, hear my words—words of wisdom! If the Squire wants to make an agreement, make one by all means, taking what ye can get, and not seeking pears of willow-trees, as the saying is."

Gregory seconded him strongly.

"'Tis God's truth!—Come with me to the tavern, all of you, and let us talk the matter over."

And presently they all left the premises together, accompanied (as it was late) by the gagging of geese and lowing of herds coming back from the fields, and many a shepherd, playing on the flute.

They went along noisily, more than one screaming at the top of his voice, merely to give vent to his satisfaction after the feast and (so to speak) blow off the steam.

Meantime, at the Borynas', when the hut had been tidied up, all was silent and dreary and eerie.

Yagna was bustling about in her own room, like a bird beating its wings in the cage: but marking how stupefied with grief all the others were, she went out and said no word to them.

The place then became still as a tomb. Supper over, and the evening household duties performed, they all felt oppressed with sleep; but no one cared to leave the big room. Sitting by the fire, they looked into the dying embers, and gave a timorous ear to every sound they heard. It was quiet outside; only the wind whistled at times, and made the trees rustle, the fences creak, and a pane jingle now and again. Or Lapa would growl, his hair stiffening all down



his back with terror; and then the dull interminable stillness would once more come over them.

There they sat, shivering with ever-increasing fear, and so scared that more than one crossed himself and said his prayers with chattering teeth. All felt sure that Something was moving about, walking in the loft above, making the rafters creak, fumbling at the door, peeping in at the windows as it passed, rattling at the latch, and going round the whole cabin with a heavy tread.

On a sudden, a neighing was heard in the stable. Lapa, barking violently, flung himself against the door, while Yuzka cried out in uncontrollable anguish: "'Tis Father! O God! 'tis Father!" in an outburst of affrighted tears.

Thereupon Yagustynka thrust her fingers forth three times, and said gravely:

"Do not weep. Weeping only keeps a soul longer upon this earth: you would prevent him from departing in peace. Open ye the door, and let the wanderer flee away to the fields of the Lord Jesus.—May he go, and peace be with him!"

They threw the door open, and presently all was as still as death. Only reddened eyes glanced about in fear, while Lapa smelt in every corner, with a whine from time to time, and a wag of his tail, as though fawning on someone . . . someone unseen. They felt now, more strongly than ever, that the dead man's soul was straying somewhere about in their midst.

At last Hanka thought of the Evening Hymn, and intoned, in a trembling husky voice:

"All our actions, done this day,  
At Thy feet, O Lord, we lay!" . . .

which the others took up heartily, and to their great relief.

## CHAPTER II

IT was an ideal summer's day.

About ten in the morning: for the sun stood half-way between east and south, and ever with hotter fires. And all the bells in Lipka belfry had begun to peal with might and main.

The loudest was the one they named Peter. It boomed full-throated: as when a peasant, somewhat in his cups, goes swaying from side to side of the roadway, and his deep roar tells all the world how merry he is.

The second, a little smaller, that (according to Ambrose) had been christened Paul, took up the strain with livelier and more high-pitched tones, ringing long and clangorously, in ecstasies of joy, like a maiden in the glow of love on a spring day, who runs out afield and, darting through the rye, sings from a full bosom to the winds, to the lands, to the clear sky, and to her own joyful heart.

And the third, the *Sygnaturka*, which announces that Mass begins, poured out its notes, like a bird, doing all that it could (though in vain) to outvie the other two with a hurried babbling tinkle.

All three, sounding together, formed a grand orchestra—a roaring bassoon, a warbling violin, and a jingling cymbal, with shrill quivering notes: their music was very solemn and very pleasant to the ear.

It was the day of the local Feast—Saint Peter and Paul—and it was for this that they called the people so joyfully.

In the bright dazzling sunshine and the burning heat, the dealers had ever since dawn been setting up their shady booths, and the tables and counters beneath them, on the large open space in front of the church.

And no sooner had the bells sent their merry peals over



the country-side than all sorts of vehicles came rolling in through clouds of dust from as far as the eye could reach, with great crowds of people on foot. All the roads, lanes and field-paths were red with women's dresses or white with men's capotes.

Still from the brazen throats of those bells did the notes pour forth, and they rolled sunward their chants and their loud invocations:

*"Kyrie!—Kyrie!—Kyrie eleison!"*

*"Madonna!—Madonna!—Most holy Madonna!"*

*"To Thee, O God!—To Thee I cry—I cry—I cry aloud!"*

All the huts were decorated with greenery; and in the whole aspect of the village, on this noted day of high solemnity, there was an atmosphere that lifted up the heart and filled it with rapture.

Every thoroughfare was soon encumbered with foot-passengers, horses and wagons: the travellers within these gazing about them in wonder at the scenery, so beautifully adorned by nature for so great a festival.

All the landscape was given over to an inundation of wild flowers. Along every pathway there reigned a wonderful profusion of soft white and gold and violet hues. The larkspur and the convolvulus put their perfumed heads forth from their hiding-places in the cornfields: bluebells and corn-flowers were seen in every patch, and the hollows where water had been now teemed with forget-me-nots, making the dells look like bits of blue, fallen from the sky. There were clumps of vetches without end, buttercups and dandelions innumerable, and the purple flowers of the thistle and clover, and daisies with camomiles—and countless others, of which only our Lord knows the names, since they were blooming for Him alone. And as sweet a perfume came up out of the fields as when his Reverence in church offers incense to the Holy Sacrament!

The new-comers smelt all those perfumes with intense pleasure, but nevertheless hurried on, not sparing the whip; for the heat was too great to bear, and simply overwhelming.

And shortly all Lipka was crowded, even to the skirts of the forest.

Whenever there was the slightest shadow, wagons were drawn up, horses unharnessed; and as to the space in front of the church, it was all but impassable.

The pond was lined with women come to wash their feet clean from the dusty road, put their shoes on, and make themselves fit for church. Mature peasants were exchanging neighbourly greetings; and the younger generation—lads and lasses—went together with wistful looks past the booths, or thronged very thick around a barrel-organ player, on whose instrument sat a strange little beast from beyond the seas, clad all in red. It had a snout not unlike the face of an old German, and leaped about so, and performed such antics, that they all held their sides with the fun of it.

The music played was so merry, they could scarce hold back from dancing where they stood. But then it was accompanied by a very different tune at the same time: the begging hymns droned out by the *Dziads*, who formed a double row, from the church-porch to the lich-gate, where sat another of them, a fat man, always led by a dog. He it was who sang most fervently, and dragged out the words with the slowest drawl of them all.

At the signal for High Mass, the whole assembly rushed to the church like a torrent in spate; in an instant it was full—so terribly full that the people felt their ribs crack. There was an awful crush indeed, and even a few sharp words, and the greater part of those come had to stay outside, by the walls, or under the trees.

Several priests had come over from the nearer parishes. They at once took their places in confessionals, set up beneath the trees, and began to shrive the people.

It was most fearfully sultry weather, the wind having died away, but the multitudes thronged patiently round the confessionals or swarmed in the churchyard, seeking in vain some protection against the extreme heat.

Mass had just begun when Hanka came along with Yuzka. But to get even so far as the church-door was out of the



question; so they stood out in the full blaze, not far from the churchyard-wall.

The organ pealing announced that High Mass was in progress. All knelt down piously, or seated themselves on the grass to pray. It was just noon now, and the heat in the still air was tremendous. The sky hung overhead like a white-hot oven tile, so dazzling that it plucked the eyes out. The earth, too, underfoot, and the walls around, glared with heat; and the poor people knelt motionless, hardly able to breathe—baked, as it were, in the sun's pitiless glow.

From within came the music of the organ, mingling with the pattering of their prayers; now and then rose a distant voice from the altar; or the tiny bells were rung; or the organist sang loud and hoarsely. Then came long intervals of relative silence in this furnace, while the incense-smoke came out by the church-door, weaving bluish odoriferous festoons round the kneelers' heads.

But in the bright incandescence of the day, this open space and the churchyard, strewn with garments of many a dazzling hue, had the air of a great garden of flowers. And so they were—these worshippers, humbly prostrate at this hallowed hour before their Lord, hidden beneath the veils of that burning sun, and of the sacred silence which enveloped them!

Even the *Dziads* had ceased from their importunate begging. Only from time to time one of them would wake up from somnolence, say a "Hail Mary" and ask alms in a louder key.

The heat was now almost that of a conflagration: the fields and orchards seemed ready to burst into white flames.

The hush, too, was yet more slumber-compelling than before; some nodded, falling asleep as they knelt; others withdrew, no doubt to refresh themselves, for a well-sweep was heard to creak.

They only quite woke up when the church rang to the tones of the whole congregation, singing within; when the banners came out waving, followed by the priest beneath the crimson baldachin, holding the Monstrance aloft, and

supported only by the Squires of the parish as he went forth for the procession, with all his parishioners behind him. Slowly, to the sound of the chants that rose up to Heaven with grand and mighty fervour, the procession—a river of humanity rolling in full flood—flowed round the church-walls, resplendently white, and radiant in the sun. And thereon floated the crimson baldachin, quite hidden in the smoke from the thuribles: only now and then did a rift in those clouds give a glimpse of the sun-like ostensory, with its golden rays. The banners, like huge birds, flapped their wings over the heads of the swarming multitudes, the feretories, wrapped in mist-like gauze, tottered forward with their bearers; and the organ thundered, and the glad bells boomed, and the whole people sang together from the bottom of their hearts, enchanted, carried away—far away—towards Heaven, towards Him, the Sun of Righteousness!

. . . . .

The service was over at length. The Squires had come out of church, seeking in vain a little shade, until Ambrose made room for them under one of the trees, and brought them chairs for their greater convenience.

The Squire of Vola had also come, but did not sit down with them, and was perpetually moving about. Whenever he saw a known face of some Lipka villager, he went up and spoke to him as a friend. Happening to meet Hanka thus, he pushed his way to her through the crowd.

"Is not your goodman back yet?"

"Alas! no."

"Ye went to bring him, of course?"

"I went directly after Father's funeral, but was told he was only to be released in a week: that is, on Saturday next."

"And the bail—what of the bail? Have ye paid the money in?"

"Roch is seeing to that," she replied, with cautious reserve.

"If ye cannot pay, I am willing to vouch for Antek."



"Thanks, most heartily," she said, bending down to his feet. "It may be that Roch can arrange all things by himself, if not, he will be forced to take other measures."

"But remember: should need arise, I'll vouch for him."

He went farther, and perceived Yagna, sitting close to the wall near her mother, and deep in prayer; unable to invent any topic or pretext of conversation, he only smiled at her, and returned to his own people.

Her eyes followed them, she being very much interested in the young ladies, who were clad in such sort that she could not but wonder, marvelling also at the whiteness of their faces and the slimness of their waists. Lord! and they breathed forth such sweet fragrance, sweet as the perfumed whorls from a censer!

And the thing they flirted to cool their cheeks! why, it was just like a turkey's tail!—And how those young Squires came and ogled them! And they laughed so loud that the people around were shocked!

Then, from the end of the village, perhaps from the bridge near the mill, there came a sudden clattering and rumbling, while volumes of dust rose above the trees.

"Come too late for Mass!" Pete whispered to Hanka.

"Just in time to put out the candles!" someone said with a laugh.

Others peeped over the wall to look out on the road that skirted the pond.

Very soon, in a tempest of noisy barking, a long line of great white-tilted vans came in sight.

"The Germans! The Germans from Podlesie!" was the cry.

It was true. There were fifteen of these vans, more or less, drawn by stout draught-horses. Women and children, sitting within, and a complete assortment of domestic furniture, were visible under the canvas coverings. Beside these vans marched a lot of burly red-headed Germans, puffing at their pipes. Great dogs ran by their sides, often showing their teeth and barking back at the Lipka dogs, which attacked them furiously.

The people drew near to look at them, several even leaving the churchyard to see them closer.

They drove by slowly, making their way with difficulty through the jumble of wagons and horses; but, on passing in front of the church, not one of them so much as doffed his cap. Their eyes were glaring, their beards bristling—with hatred, no doubt. And they eyed the people with murderous looks.

"Ha! ha! Long-Trousers! . . . Carrion!"

"Ye horse-begotten ones!"

"Droppings of swine!"

And other epithets fell, thick as hail.

"Well?" Matthew called out to them. "Who has won the day, O Fatherlanders?"

"Who is forced to leave, you or we?"

"Our fists are too heavy; is it not so?"

"Come, stay awhile; 'tis our local feast.—We'll make merry with you in the tavern."

They replied nothing, but lashed their horses to urge them on.

"Not so fast, or your breeches will come tumbling down!"

Here a boy threw a stone at them, and several seized bricks to follow up the blow, but were stopped in time.

"Let them alone, lads, and allow this plague to go from us."

"A sudden death carry you off, ye ungodly hounds!"

And a Lipka woman stretched out her fist, screaming after them:

"May all of you perish like mad dogs!"

So they passed by, and vanished on the poplar road, as the clattering of their carts faded away with the column of dust they had raised.

The people of Lipka were overjoyed, and could pray no more, but came clustering around the Squire in increasing numbers. This pleased him vastly, and he talked gaily with them and offered them snuff.

"Ah!" he said at length; "so you have smoked them out and the swarm has flown, hey?"



Gregory replied, in tone of mock pity: "Our sheepskins do not delight their nostrils. And then they are too delicate folk to dwell nigh us: if we come to loggerheads with any of them, why, down he goes straightway."

The Squire asked with curiosity: "What, have you fought together at any time?"

"Why, no . . . not a fight exactly . . . but Matthew here just gave one of them a tap for not returning his greeting, 'Praised be Jesus Christ!' And behold, the fellow was at once covered with blood, and well-nigh gave up the ghost!"

"They are a soft-limbed people," Matthew explained blandly. "To the eyes they look strong as oak-trees; but put forth your fist, 'twill feel as though it had struck a feather-bed!"

"And in Podlesie they had no chance. Lost their kine, it is said."

"True, they have not brought even one away with them now!"

"Kobus might tell us something . . ." one of them was beginning, when Klemba cut in sharply:

"They died—as all know—of rinderpest."

The men shook with suppressed laughter, but kept it down well, while the smith pressed forward, and said: "If the Germans have gone, we owe it to his Honour the Squire."

"Because I prefer to sell my land to my own countrymen, no matter on what terms," the latter asserted with great energy; and went on to assert that his grandfather and great-grandfather had always held with the peasants.

Sikora grinned to hear this, and said in a lower tone: "Aye, 'tis a fact, and the Squire his father scored it on my back with a horse-whip to remember! I bear the marks yet!"

But the other had apparently not heard him, and was telling what trouble he had had to get rid of the Germans. The peasants listened with civil assent; but, as to his kind feelings, they kept their own opinion.

"Surely butter would not melt in our benefactor's mouth,"

Sikora sneered; and Klemba bade him hold his tongue.

Whilst they were thus complimenting one another, a clergyman in surplice, with a plate in his hand, pushed his way into the group.

"If 'tis not Yanek, the organist's son!"

It was he, but now wearing the priest's cassock, and making the collection. He greeted everyone, and collected with great success; for they knew him, and it was impossible to let him pass without offering something. So each man undid the bundle his money was knotted in, and often a silver *zloty* jingled amongst the coppers on the plate. The Squire flung down a rouble, the young ladies of Vola small silver coins in plenty. Yanek, streaming with perspiration, red as fire, but happy and radiant, went on collecting indefatigably all through the churchyard, passing no one by, and saying a good word to everybody. He met Hanka, and saluted her so cordially that she gave twenty kopeks. But when he came face to face with Yagna, clinking the money in his plate before her, she raised her eyes—and was struck dumb with amazement. He too was so taken aback by her confusion that he at once and without a word passed on farther.

She had even forgotten to make an offering, lost as she was in the contemplation of the young man—the very image, she thought, of the saint painted above one of the side-altars: so young, so slender, so beautiful to look upon! Oh, what a spell those gleaming eyes of his had cast on her! . . . Vainly she rubbed her eyes, and crossed herself again and again to get rid of it.

Around her ran whispers:

"Only an organist's son, yet how well he is clad!"

"And his mother is as vain as a turkey about him."

"Ever since Eastertide, he has been at the school for priests."

"His Reverence sent for him to make the collection to-day."

"For his son, at least, the grasping old skinflint is liberal enough."



"Surely, for will not the glory of the priesthood do honour to him too?"

"Aye, and no small profit will be his likewise."

But Yagna, following him with fascinated eyes, heard no word of what they said.

The service being quite at an end, the congregation was now dispersing, and Hanka was moving towards the gate, when Balcerkova came up to her with important news.

"Know ye that, between Simon, son of Dominikova, and the girl Nastka, the banns have just been published?"

"Oh, but what will Dominikova say to that?"

"There will, of course, be another quarrel."

"She cannot do anything to prevent it: Simon is in the right—and of age besides."

"There will be a perfect hell in the hut," Yagustynka observed.

Hanka sighed: "Are there too few quarrels and sins against God as it is?"

"Have ye heard," Ploshkova asked her, "the news about the Voyt?" And she brought her large belly and bloated face unpleasantly close.

"I have had so much trouble with the funeral, and so many other cares of late, that I know naught of what goes on in the village."

"Well, the head man at the office told my goodman that the village accounts were short by a great sum. And now the Voyt is going about everywhere and whining to get money lent to him; for there may be an investigation any day."

"Father-in-law used to say it would surely end in that wise."

"Aye, he was puffed up, and proud, and played the great man; now he must pay for his greatness."

"Can his land be taken from him?"

"Of course it can; and if it should not suffice, he must go to jail," Yagustynka said. "The rogue has had his fling: let him have his punishment!"

"I could not understand why of late he never showed his face at our cabin, even for the funeral."

"Oh, 'twas not Boryna but Boryna's widow he cared for!"

But Yagna, holding her mother by the hand, was passing by, and they held their peace. Nevertheless, and though the old dame walked stooping and with eyes still bound, Yagustynka could not refrain from a hit at her.

"When is Simon's wedding to be? What we heard to-day from the pulpit was so unexpected! . . . Though indeed, now the lad is tired of doing a girl's work, it is hard to forbid him his manhood. And," she added mockingly, "Nastka will do that work now for him."

Dominikova drew herself up suddenly, and addressed Yagna in a hard voice:

"Take—take me away, else that viper will sting me again."

She went sobbing away, and Ploshka chuckled.

"Blind as she was, she knew well who you were!"

"She's not so blind but that she can see to tear Simon's hair out!"

"Ah, God grant she may harm no one else besides!"

There was no more talking; they were in the great crush close to the gate, and Hanka was separated from the others: not much grieved to be spared that cruel backbiting they enjoyed so. To each of the *Dziads* she gave a kopek, and five to the blind one with the dog, saying: "Come and dine with us, *Dziad!*—At the Borynas'!"

He lifted his head, and rolled his sightless eyes. "I think ye're Antek's wife.—God reward you!—Surely I shall come . . . and speedily."

Without the gates, the throng was less dense; but there too sat more *Dziads*, in two parallel rows, uttering various complaints. At the very end was a young man, with a green shade over his eyes, singing to the accompaniment of his fiddle ballads about the "kings of olden time," and surrounded by a large audience: coins were frequently dropped into his cap, his performance being a decided hit.

Hanka, who stood close to the churchyard, looking for



Yuzka, most unexpectedly happened to see her father.

He was amongst the *Dziads*, holding out his hands for alms, and begging with the usual whine of the class!

At first she thought her eyes were mistaken, and rubbed them, and looked again. No! it was—it was—he himself!

"My father a *Dziad*! O Lord!" She flushed burning red with the shame of it, drew her kerchief far over her brows, and crept round to him from behind the wagons by which he was sitting.

"What, oh, what do ye here?" she groaned, crouching behind him lest she should be seen.

"Hanka! . . . Yes . . . it is I."

"Come with me!—Come home!—Instantly!—O Lord Jesus, such a disgrace to us all! Come."

"I will not . . . long have I thought to do this. . . . Why should I burden you, if kindly folk will come to my aid? . . . I will go along with the others . . . see the world . . . visit the sanctuaries . . . hear about new things.—Aye, and I will bring money home to you. See, here's a *zloty*: buy a toy for little Peter therewith.—Here!"

She seized him firmly by the coat-collar, and almost by main force dragged him out of the jumble of wagons.

"Home with me this instant, I say!—What, have ye no shame?"

"Unhand me, or I shall be angry with you!"

"That wallet, throw it away! And quickly, lest any behold it!"

"Look ye, I will do just as I choose. Wherefore should I be ashamed? 'The wallet's his mother, who has Hunger for brother.'" At those words he jerked himself free from her, darted away among the horses and carts, and disappeared.

It was out of the question to think of following him in such a crowd as there was all round the church.

There the people, though drenched with perspiration, half choked with dust, half roasted by the heat, were all the same enjoying themselves to their hearts' content, in this seething cauldron!

The barrel-organ played lustily, the *Dziads* cried aloud,

the little ones whistled in the earthenware birds they had bought; horses were biting each other and squealing, being more than usually tormented with flies that day; and men talked with their friends, or went in company to look at the booths, besieged especially by girls, who were swarming there like bees about a hive.

The articles sold were more or less those on sale at the annual fairs: pictures of saints, victuals and homely dainties, clothing, ribbons, beads, etc.; and at every booth there was a great concourse of people, stopping there on their way from church.

Some went afterwards to the tavern, some straight home. Others, overcome with sleep and weariness, just laid themselves down under the wagons or about the orchards and farm-yards to refresh themselves and to rest.

In so intense a heat that they could scarcely breathe, few cared much to chat, or even to move: many felt stupefied, almost swooning. And as just then the villagers sat down to their meal, the place grew quieter at last.

At the priest's house, they had made a grand dinner for the clergymen and the Squires, whose heads were to be seen through the open windows, out of which floated the noise of talk and the clinking of glasses, together with such delightful aromas as made the mouths of them that passed by to water.

Ambrose, arrayed in his very best, and wearing all his military decorations, was continually moving about the passages, and heard frequently crying out in the porch: "You riff-raff away, or I thrash you within an inch of your lives!"

But his threats served him in no way; the urchins were like sparrows, perched all over the fences; and the boldest even crept under the windows. He could only scold, and threaten them with his Reverence's stick.

Hanka, in search of her father, came to him just then, and asked whether he had not seen him.

"Bylitsa?—Why, 'tis so tremendously hot, he must be



asleep somewhere in the shadow.—Ah! ye little wretches!" he cried, and went stumping after the urchins.

Greatly upset, Hanka returned home, and told the occurrence to her sister, who had come to dine with her.

But Veronka only gave a shrug.

"His having joined the *Dziads* will not cost him a kingdom, and it will make things easier for us. Better men than he have ended likewise!"

"But, good God! what a disgrace to us, to let our own father go a-begging!—And what will Antek say?—And the others, our neighbours, will they not cry out that we have turned him out to beg?"

"Let them yelp as they please! Anyone can wag his tongue; but who will offer help? No one."

"And I—I will not allow my father to beg."

"So high and mighty? Then take him and feed him yourself."

"So will I!—You, you grudge him a few spoonfuls of food.—Oh, I see now! . . . 'tis you that have driven him to this!"

"What? what? is there too much of aught in my home? Am I to take the food out of my children's mouths, and give it to him?"

"Yet remember: he has a legal claim to be fed by you for the land he made over."

"To give what I have not, I will not rend my bowels."

"Rend them, but give: Father comes first! He has more than once complained to me that you starve him, and care less for him than for your swine."

"Most true. I starve my father, and live myself like a rich lady! So stout am I that my petticoat slips off my hips, and I have hardly strength to crawl."

"Do not talk so: folk might think ye spoke the truth."

"But I do! Were it not for Yankel, we should not even get the potatoes and salt we eat.—Ah, 'tis a true saying: 'Goodman Bellyful thinks no one is hungry.'"

She was going on in this way, and growing more and more

querulous, when the blind man, led by his dog, appeared on the premises.

"Sit ye down here by the hut," Hanka said, and hurried away to get him his dinner.

Dinner had been already served under the trees, and the smell of the dishes came to his nostrils.

"Groats and fat bacon: very good indeed. May it profit you!" the beggar muttered, sniffing the scent of it, and smacking his lips.

His dog sat close to the house-wall, panting with wide-open jaws, and tongue lolling out; for the heat was so great as to melt them all to nothing. In the hot sleepy stillness, only the scraping of the spoons was heard, with (at times) a swallow twittering under the eaves.

"Oh, how cooling would a little dish of sour milk be!" sighed the *Dziad*.

Yuzka answered at once: "Be easy, I shall fetch you some."

"Well, has your whining brought you in much to-day?" Pete asked, tapping the dish lazily with his spoon.

"Lord have mercy on all sinners, and remember not their ill-treatment of the *Dziads*!—Brought me in much, quotha!—Whoso sees a *Dziad* must needs stare into the sky, or turn down another road. Or, drawing forth some miserable small coin, he will wish he had change for a five-kopek piece. We shall die of starvation!"

"But," Veronka objected, "this year the hard times before harvest press sorely on all of us."

"They do; but for all that, no man goes short of vodka."

Yuzka here put a porringer in his hands, and he began to sup it eagerly.

Presently he said: "They tell us the Lipka folk are to come to terms with the Squire to-day: is it so?"

"They may do so," Hanka said, "if they get their rights granted."

"And do ye know," Vitek put in, "that the Germans have gone from amongst us?"



"Oh, may the plague stop their breath!" the *Dziad* burst out, clenching his fist with fury.

"Have they, then, injured you too?"

"I went to them last evening: they set their dogs at me! . . . Scum of the earth, dog-begotten miscreants! . . . I hear the men of Lipka have made it too hot for them to stay. . . . Ha! I would flay them alive, leave not a rag of skin upon any of them!" he said, as he emptied the porringer, and, after feeding his dog, prepared to depart.

"'Tis your harvest now, and ye must go and gather it in," Pete said sarcastically.

"I must, indeed. Last year we were only six in all here; now we are four times as many, and my ears tingle with the din we make."

Yuzka said: "Pray spend the night with us."

"May our Lord give you health, O you that remember the poor starveling!"

"A fine starveling indeed! With such a belly that he can hardly drag it!" sneered Pete, seeing him waddle ponderously in the middle of the road, groping for obstacles with his staff.

And then they all went out again: to hear Vespers, and enjoy the sweet tones of the organ, and weep their fill in church, and then visit the booths once more, were it only to feast their eyes on the splendours they displayed.

Simon had bought a string of amber beads for his Nastka, and ribbons, and a bright scarlet kerchief: all of which she immediately put on. And then they went from booth to booth, arms round waists, overflowing with gladness and intoxicated with joy.

Yuzka followed them, trying here and there to cheapen some article for sale, and ever more ruefully counting her money—only one wretched *zloty* in all!

Yagna, not far from them, affected not to see her brother, and walked alone, sorrowful and forlorn. All those fluttering ribbons now failed to rejoice her; and the barrel-organ's tunes, and the crowd and the hubbub, failed too.

She walked along, carried on by the multitudes, and stopping where they stopped, knowing neither why she had come nor whither she was drifting.

Matthew glided up to her, and whispered softly:

"Do not drive me away from you!"

"And have I ever done that?"

"Once surely. And with words of upbraiding!"

"Because you had said what you should not—and I had no choice.—Someone had——"

She broke off suddenly; Yanek was slowly pushing through the crowd towards her.

"He's here, then?" whispered Matthew, pointing to the young cleric, whose hands people wanted to kiss, and who smilingly refused the honour.

"He behaves like the son of a Squire! And how well I remember him, not so long since, running after the kine!"

"He, tending kine?—Never!" she exclaimed, hurt by the very thought.

"I have said. I recollect perfectly how the organist thrashed him one day for letting the kine graze in Prychek's oat-patch, he asleep under a pear-tree the while."

Yagna left him, and timidly made her way towards the young cleric, who smiled at her, but (finding himself the observed of all observers) turned his eyes away at once; and having purchased some tiny engravings of saints at a booth, he set about distributing these to anyone who cared to get them.

She stood rooted to the spot, gazing on him with ardent eyes. And to her vermilion lips there came a smile—bright, calm, and very sweet, like honey.

"Here is your holy patron, Yagna," he said, handing her a picture of St. Agnes.—Their hands just touched, and fell apart, as from the smart of a burn.

She, shaking all over, durst not utter one syllable. He added a word or two, but she remained speechless, her eyes drowned in his.

The crowd drove them asunder. She placed the engrav-



ing in her bodice, and looked about her for some time. He was not visible any more, having entered the church, where another service was going on. But still she saw him in fancy.

"How like he is to that saint above the altar!" she said, uttering her thoughts aloud.

"And that's why all the girls stare at him so!—They are foolish. 'Not for dogs, I'm afraid, are sausages made.'"

She looked round quickly: Matthew was by her side!

Murmuring some inarticulate words, she tried to get away from him, but in vain; he followed her step by step. It was some time, however, before he ventured on putting this question:

"Yagna, what says your mother about Simon's banns?"

"What can she say? Let him marry, if he choose: his will is his own."

He made a wry face, and asked hesitatingly:

"But tell me, will she make over to him his portion of land?"

"How should I know? She has said naught to me. He can ask her himself."

Simon and Nastka then joined them, with Andrew, who appeared suddenly, the five thus forming quite a group. Simon spoke first:

"Yagna, do not take Mother's part; she would do me an injustice."

"No, it is your part I am taking.—But, good heavens! how you have changed in these last few days! . . . 'Tis wonderful!" And, indeed, the brother she now saw before her was quite a dashing young fellow—clean-shaven, straight-backed, with a hat tilted on one side, and a snow-white capote!

"Because I am my mother's drudge no longer."

"And are you better off in your freedom?" she inquired, pleased at his spirit.

"Ask the bird you let go out of your hand: ye will see! . . . Did you hear the banns published?"

"And when is the wedding to be?"

Here Nastka answered, nestling tenderly to his side, and passing her arm round his waist:

"In three weeks, before harvest-home." And she blushed deeply.

"And the wedding shall take place, were it in the tavern: I will not beg to use Mother's cabin."

"But have you a place for your wife?"

"Certainly; I shall remove to the side of our cabin opposite Mother's. I shall not seek lodgings amongst the villagers. Let her but give me the land that's my due—I shall do well!" he said, swelling with self-confidence.

"And we," Matthew declared, "are not going to send Nastka away empty-handed. She will get one thousand *zloty* in cash!"

Here the smith came up, took him aside, whispered a word, and hurried away.

They went on talking, and filling up imaginary details. Simon thought with sparkling eyes what a good farmer he would be, once come into his own, and how he would settle down to work. Oh, they would soon see what a man he was!—Nastka gazed on him, open-mouthed in wonder. Andrew talked in the same sense; Yagna alone was absent-minded, hearing barely half of what they said. It did not interest her.

"Yagna!" Matthew cried. "Come over to the tavern; the band will be playing."

"I care no more for such amusements," she replied, sadly.

Her eyes were dimmed. He shot a glance into them, pulled his cap down, and rushed off, jostling those in his way. In front of the priest's house he met Teresa.

"Whither away?" she asked him timidly.

"To the tavern. A meeting has been called by the smith."

"I should go with you gladly."

"I neither thrust you aside, nor is there lack of space. But take heed lest they speak evil of you for the glances of your eyes!"

"They speak as it is, and tear me to pieces, as dogs tear a dead sheep."



"Then wherefore give them occasion?" he asked, now growing impatient.

"Wherefore? Well, you know wherefore!" she replied in a husky voice.

He walked forward, and so fast that she could hardly keep up with him.

Suddenly turning round on her, "Now then!" he cried; "there ye are, shedding tears like a calf!"

"Nay, nay! 'twas but a little dust in mine eyes," she returned.

Unexpectedly, he moderated his pace, and, walking by her side, spoke to her with much gentleness:

"Here is a little money: purchase something for yourself at one of these booths.—And come ye to the tavern: we will dance together."

She would fain have fallen at his feet to thank him.

"For the money I care not; but your kindness, how great it is!" she faltered, her face red as fire.

"Well, come then; but later. Until the evening I shall be much engaged."

And with a farewell smile on the tavern door-step, he went in.

There were plenty of people there, and it was stifling hot. The great room was full of people, drinking and chatting with one another; but the private parlour contained the best youth of Lipka, with the smith and Gregory, the Voyt's brother, at their head. There were several of the older farmers, too: Ploshka, the Soltys, Klemba, and Adam, cousin to Boryna. Even Kobus, though uninvited, had found means to enter.

When Matthew came in, Gregory was speaking very earnestly, and writing with chalk on the table.

By the proposed agreement, the Squire promised to give four acres of the Podlesie farm for each one of the forest they made over to him; also to let them have as much more land, to be paid by instalments. Moreover, he was to give them timber on credit for building the huts.

All this Gregory set forth, article by article, calculating in

figures how the land should be divided, and how much each was to get.

"'A promise is a toy made to give fools joy!'" grumbled Ploshka.

"But this—this is a fact, not a promise. He is to sign everything at the notary's—and do not forget it! So much land for us folk! Each family in Lipka will have an additional holding: think of that, my masters!"

The blacksmith here repeated what the Squire had directed him to say.

They listened attentively, in silence, looking hard at the white figures on the table, and reflecting.

"'Tis all right—a golden opportunity; but will the Commissioner give his consent to it?" asked the Soltys, first to speak, and running his fingers through his shock of hair.

"He must!" Gregory thundered. "When our assembly has decided, we shall ask no official's leave: he cannot help himself! We will have it so!"

"Leave or no leave, there's no need to shout so loud. Will one of you see whether the policeman is not listening, close outside the wall?"

"I saw him drinking at the bar this minute," Matthew affirmed.

"And when," someone asked, "has the Squire said he would sign?"

"To-morrow, if ye will," was the answer. "Let us but accept, he will sign at once, and we can measure the ground out afterwards."

"Then, directly after harvest-home, we might enter into possession?"

"And give it proper tilling in autumn?"

"Ah! splendid! . . . How the work will go on then!"

All began talking excitedly together. They were full of joy; their eyes shone with the consciousness of success, and they stretched their arms forth as if to seize upon the long-wished-for holdings.

Some fell to humming tunes, some to calling on the Jew



for vodka, out of sheer gladness. Some talked no little nonsense about the division of the portions they were to have, and everyone had visions of the new lands and riches and happiness that were to be theirs.

They were like men drunk: they babbled, they drummed on the table with their fists, on the floor with their feet: the uproar was tremendous.

"Ah! then—then the local feast at Lipka will indeed be a grand affair!"

"And how many weddings we shall have every Carnival!"

"Why, all the Lipka girls will not suffice!"

"We shall send to town for more, hey?"

"Be quiet, boys!" old Ploshka exclaimed, thumping on the table for silence. "Ye make such a hullabaloo as do the Jews in their synagogue on the Sabbath.—What I would say is this: is there not some trick in the Squire's offer?"

They all became silent suddenly: it was a bucket of cold water thrown over their enthusiasm. At last the Soltys spoke:

"I too can in no wise understand what makes the man so very lavish."

"Aye," one of the older men chimed in; "there must be something wrong about it: else how could he give up so much land almost for nothing?"

Gregory flew into a passion, and cried out:

"This I say: ye are a lot of drivelling fools!"

And once more he set to explain everything, till he was all in perspiration. The blacksmith, too, put things as strongly as he could: but there was no convincing old Ploshka. He only wagged his head and smiled sceptically, till Gregory leaped at him with fists clenched and trembling with restrained fury.

"Say your say, then, since you think ours to be worthless!"

"So will I.—Well do I know that set of hounds; and I tell you: believe naught till ye see it down in black and white. They have from all time grown fat by wronging us; and now they mean to make money by some other wrong."

"If ye think thus, ye may withhold your vote; but do not prevent the others!" Klemba cried.

"And you—you, one of them that went up against him to the forest: do you now take his part?"

"As I went then, so will I go once more, if needful! I take not his part, but am only for a just agreement that shall advantage us all. Only a fool cannot see that such a contract is for the good of Lipka. Only a fool will refuse what is offered him."

"'Tis ye that are all fools! Ye would sell your breeches for a pair of braces.—Aye, and doubly fools! for if the Squire will give so much, he will perchance give yet more."

They went on disputing, while others took Klemba's part, and the noise grew so deafening that Yankel came in, putting a bottleful of vodka on the table.

"Come, come, good farmers all!" he cried. "Here's to Podlesie—a new Lipka!—And be ye all masters there!" And he passed the vodka from one to another.

This caused a still greater din; but everyone was now in favour of the agreement—except old Ploshka.

The smith—he must have been well paid for his good offices—spoke the loudest of all, extolling the Squire, and his honourable intentions; and he stood drinks to the whole company—now vodka, now beer, now rum with so-called "essence."

They had thus enjoyed themselves a good deal—some indeed too well—when suddenly Kobus, who had hitherto not uttered one single word, started up and attacked them all with a savage onslaught of abuse.

"And where do we *Komorniki* come in?" he shrieked. "Are we mere cat's-paws? We all who are not landowners stand up against this agreement. What, shall one have a belly so great he can hardly walk, and another die of starvation? The lands must be meted out equally to all.—Ye are all of you carrion and Squires!—Look at them, those bare-backed ones, who yet hold their heads as high as if they sneezed at us all!" He screamed so loud, and with such



foul language, that they put him out of doors; but outside the tavern he still continued his invectives and imprecations.

They then separated, some to go home, and some to enjoy the dance, for the music had just struck up.

Evening was falling now. The sky, all in flames, tinged the orchard tree-tops and the ears of corn with crimson and gold. A soft damp wind had sprung up, and the croaking of frogs and the piping of quails resounded; the grasshoppers' shrill notes were heard in the fields, mingling with the everlasting rustling of the cornstalks, the rumbling of the carts driving off, and now and then the drunken song of a man on his way home.

These noises gradually subsided. The villagers sat outside their huts, enjoying the quiet and the cool of the evening.

Boys were bathing near the mill, splashing and bawling; in the enclosures, the lasses were singing country songs.

There was next to no one at the Borynas'. Hanka had gone out with the children; Pete had absented himself somewhere, and Yagna had been away since Vespers.

Only Yuzka, busied with the evening household cares, was there with the blind *Dziad*. He, sitting in the porch, inhaled the cool breeze and, while mumbling a prayer, lent an attentive ear to the approaches of Vitek's stork, that was sidling up for a surprise attack on his legs with its beak.

"Ah, you villain, a murrain on you!—How hard it pecks!" he grumbled, drawing his feet under him, and waving his long rosary. But the stork only retreated a few paces, and again, with its long stretched-out beak, advanced in another direction.

"Oh, I hear you well! You shall not get at me this time. —A clever fowl, though!" he muttered. But just then he heard someone fiddling in the yard; so he drove the stork away with several cuts of his rosary, in order to listen with more pleasure to the sounds.

"Yuzka, who is it playing so feately?"

"Only Vitek! He has learned to play from Pete; and

now he is for ever playing, till one's ears tingle.—Vitek, have done, and give the colts their clover now!" she called to him.

The fiddle was silent. But a thought had struck the *Dziad* and when Vitek came in, he said to him in a most friendly tone:

"Here's for you. Such good playing is well worth a five-kopek piece."

Vitek was immensely gratified.

"Can you play pious tunes as well?"

"Whatsoever I hear, I can play."

"Ah, but 'every fox praises its own tail.'—Now, prithee, play this air." And he bleated out something in his professional line, shrill, slow, and quavering.

Vitek brought his fiddle before the *Dziad* had done, and after first imitating him exactly, then repeated the tune with such variations as he had heard in church. The *Dziad* was astounded.

"Why, lad, you could even become an organist!"

"Oh, I can play anything—from the music heard in the Manors to the songs they sing in the taverns." So Vitek boasted, and went on playing snatches of what he had heard, till the fowls at roost set to cackling, and Hanka, who had come back, sent him off to help Yuzka with her work.

Hanka then sat down in the porch, suckling her little ones, and conversing with the *Dziad*, who spun incredible yarns for her all the time; which she did not call in question, but listened, with sad eyes looking out into the night.

Yagna was not back yet. She had gone out to see some girl friends; but, agitated by the spirit of unrest, she could stay nowhere. Again and again she had felt forced to leave their huts, and in the end she wandered alone about the village. She gazed long upon the waters, now dark, yet visible as they trembled to the breeze; on the gently stirring shadows; on the cottage lights that shot over the surface of the pond and died away in the distance. Then, impelled onward, she cast a glance beyond the mill at the meadows,



wrapped in warm white mist, while the lapwings flapped about, flying over her head.

There she gave ear to the waters that rolled through the sluices down the river's murky throat, beneath the lofty slumberous alder-trees; and she fancied the sound was a mournful call—a tearful melodious complaint.

From one end of Lipka to the other she wandered, lost like those waters that can find no outlet, and beat for ever sadly between impassable rocky walls.

Something was gnawing at her heart. It was not sorrow, not yearning, nor the sensation of love. Her eyes were burning with an arid glow, and she felt an awful sob swelling her bosom as if about to tear it asunder.

Now, after a time—she knew not how—she found herself close to the priest's house. A carriage and horses were outside the porch; she heard them pawing restlessly. There was a light in one room only, where the visitors were playing at cards.

On all this she gazed idly to her heart's content; then passed along the fence between Klemba's lands and the priest's large garden. She slipped close to the quickset hedge, in great nervous agitation: the overhanging boughs dashed the dew from their leaves into her face. On she moved mechanically, never thinking where her steps were leading her . . . till the organist's one-storied house rose up barring the way.

The four front windows were all open and lighted.

She crept along, hugging the shadow of the hedge, till close enough to look in.

A lamp hung from the ceiling; under it the father and mother were taking tea with their children; but Yanek was walking about the room, and talking to them.

She could catch every one of his words, every creak of the boarded floor, the ceaseless tick of the clock, and even the organist's heavy breathing.

Yanek was speaking of things so much beyond her that she could not make out one word.

But, fixing her eyes on him as on the picture of some

saint, she drank in every sound of his voice, sweeter to her than the sweetest honey. As he walked, he at times was unseen, towards the end of the room: then again he reappeared, coming into the lamp-lit circle. Several times he stopped by the window, and she shrank back, fearing to be seen; but he always looked only up into the starbesprinkled sky, saying a few pleasant words that brought a laugh to the others' lips and bright looks into their eyes. At last he sat down by his mother's side, and his little sisters climbed upon his knees, clinging to his neck, while he hugged them fondly and caressed them, and played with them till the cabin echoed to their innocent laughter.

The clock struck. His mother rose, saying:

"You are for ever chattering, but 'tis bedtime; and you have to start by daybreak to-morrow."

"True, Mother dear.—Alas! how short this day has seemed to me!" he complained.

Yagna's heart was wrung so sorely that the tears welled up to her eyes.

"But," he added, "our vacation is nigh; and the Rector has promised to let me go home sooner, if his Reverence will but write to ask him."

"I shall beg him to do so; fear naught, he will write," said his mother, who was making a bed for him just opposite the window.

Their farewells were long and loving; his mother held him to her breast, as she kissed him.

"To bed now, my dearest, and sleep sound."

And now at last he was alone!

Yagna saw how they walked on tiptoe in the other rooms, and spoke in whispers, not to disturb him. They closed the windows, and soon the whole house was noiseless, that Yanek might sleep more soundly.

Yagna too would have gone home, but for something that kept her rooted to the spot; and she stood spellbound, staring into that last open lighted window.

Yanek read for some time out of a great book; then, kneeling down by the window, he crossed himself, clasped



his hands in prayer, raised his eyes to Heaven, and began in an impressive whisper.

It was dead of night. Silence reigned; the stars were twinkling in the heights of heaven. A warm fragrant breath came from the fields, and at intervals there sounded the rustling of a bough, the faint warbling of a bird.

Yagna was now growing more and more beside herself. Her heart throbbed madly, her eyes glowed with fire, her full lips were burning hot. Instinctively, she stretched her arms out to him; though at the same time she was shrinking back within herself, she felt a strange resistless agitation take hold of her, and had to lean against the fence that creaked again to her trembling.

Yanek looked out of the window and around, then went on with his prayer.

What then took place within her, she was never able to understand. Such a fire ran through all her limbs, and with such penetration, that she was ready to cry aloud with the delicious pain of it. Shudders came over her like swift lightning flashes; she felt a burning whirlwind rushing away with her; wild cries, impatient to break forth, thronged all her being, tense with an unspeakable longing. She wanted to crawl towards him—nearer—nearer—but only to lay her lips on his white hands—kneel to him—gaze on him close at hand—pray to him as to some holy image! Yet she held back, deterred by a feeling of mystic dread, and the vague fear of some horrible evil.

"O Jesus! O merciful Jesus!" escaped her lips in a stifled moan.

Yanek rose, bent out of the window, and said, as though he had perceived her:

"Who is there?"

In mortal alarm, she held her breath. Her heart stopped beating, she was paralysed with a sort of sacred terror. Her soul, as it were, fluttered in her throat, as it fluctuated in the throes of suspense—and rapturous disquiet!

But Yanek saw nothing save the fence. He shut the window, undressed quickly, and put out the light.

Then the night fell upon her. She still remained there a long time, gloating upon the blackness of the silent window. The chill of the darkness struck through her, sprinkling its silver dew over her hot desires, quenching the ardour in her blood, and shedding over her a sense of unutterable happiness! A sweetly solemn calm pervaded her soul—the calm of the flowers which dream before sunrise—and she burst forth into a wordless prayer of bliss—the marvellous sweetness of that ecstasy which the mind's unsullied dreams bring forth—unspeakable joy like that of a spring day which dawns—and with it came glad tears in big beads—beads from the rosary of thanksgiving offered to the Lord!



### CHAPTER III

“PRAY, Hanka, may I go home?” Yuzka entreated, laying her head down upon the pew-seat.

“Aye, do: run about everywhere like a silly calf!” said Hanka, rebuking her, and looking up from her rosary.

“But I feel so faint, so weary!”

“Do not be so restless: it will be over soon.”

His Reverence was just ending a low Mass for Boryna’s soul, which the family had retained for the octave of his death.

All his nearest relations sat in the side-pews. Yagna and her mother alone were kneeling in front of the altar. Somewhere in the choir, Agata, was pattering prayers aloud.

The church, cool and quiet, was dark, except for one streak of light that shot in through the open door, and lit up the place as far as the pulpit.

Michael, the organist’s pupil, served Mass, jingling the tiny bells very loud, as usual, and also as usual continually turning his head about after the swallows which were darting in and out of the place.

The priest having ended Mass, they all went out to the churchyard; but as they were going past the belfry, Ambrose called them.

“His Reverence wishes to speak to you.”

And he came up almost at once, with his breviary under his arm, and wiping his bald crown. Having welcomed them kindly, he said:

“My friends, I want to say how well you have acted in having a Mass said for the deceased: it will help his soul towards its eternal rest. It will, I assure you.”

He then took snuff, sneezed violently, and asked them if they intended dividing the property that day. And, on receiving the answer that this was the date after the funeral on which the division was usual, he continued:

"Then I may say a few words about it to you. In dividing the property, remember to do all things by common consent, and to act justly. Let me hear of no quarrels, no dissensions. If Boryna knew that you tore—as wolves tear a sheep—that estate to the prosperity of which he gave his whole life, he would turn in his grave. Moreover, God forbid that ye wrong any one of the orphans! Yuzka is but a simple child as yet; Gregory is far away. Let each have his own, even to the uttermost kopek!—Also, when making the division, have a care to respect his known will. His soul, peradventure, sees you at this very moment! . . . As I am always telling you in my sermons, concord is the great thing—it upholds all in the world: naught was ever done with discord—naught but sin and the transgression of God's law.—Further, ye should not forget the church. He was always liberal, and neither for lights nor for Masses, nor for any other need, did he ever grudge his money. Wherefore did God bless the work of his hands."

He continued for some time in this strain. They embraced his knees with grateful thanks. Yuzka, weeping loudly, fell on her knees to kiss his hand. He took her to his bosom, kissed her on the crown of her head, and said soothingly:

"To weep is foolish, little one: the orphan is God's especial care."

Hanka, deeply touched, whispered: "Her own father could not have been more loving." He was very much moved himself, for he hastily brushed a tear away, offered snuff to the blacksmith, and changed the conversation.

"Well, are ye coming to terms with the Squire?"

"We are; five of us go to the Manor this very day."

"God be praised! I will say a Mass to that intention on my own account."

"I think the village ought to have a Votive Mass sung



with the greatest solemnity. What! Does not each of us get a new farm—as it were for nothing?”

“You are right, Michael. And I have said a good word for you to the Squire.—Now, go your ways, and remember: Concord and justice!”

“And—hist, Michael!” he called after the smith, who was leaving; “come ye round later to see about my curricule: the right spring is bent and grazes the axle-tree.”

“Oh, the bulky priest of Laznov has weighed it down; ’tis very like.”

And so they all went to Boryna’s, Yagna the last, going with her mother, who could scarcely drag herself along.

It being a work-day, there were but few people on the mill-pond road: only a few children playing about. Though early in the morning, the sun was hot, but agreeably tempered by the wind, which blew hard enough to make the orchards toss their branches about, laden with ripe red cherries, and the corn beat against the fences in boisterous waves.

The huts stood open, and their gates as well; the bedding lay spread upon the hedgerows, and everybody was out in the fields. Some were bringing in the last of the hay, which filled the nostrils with aromatic scent, and left long strips that waved like streaming Jews’ beards, from the trees the heaped-up wagons passed under.

They walked along, pondering the question of how the property should be divided.

A ditty rose, wafted on the wind—possibly from the fields where they were at work on the potatoes; from the mill came the beating of the water-wheels, mingling with the strokes of a washerwoman’s batlet hard by.

“The mill is continually grinding now,” Magda remarked.

“Aye, the days before harvest are the miller’s harvest.”

Hanka sighed. “Times are much harder this year than last. Everyone complains bitterly, and the *Komorniki* are really starving.”

“And the Koziols,” the blacksmith added, “are prowling about to snap up anything they can lay hands on!”

"Say not that. The poor creatures keep themselves alive as best they can. Yesterday Koslova sold her ducklings to the organist's wife, and got some money thereby."

"They will soon drink it all," Magda returned. "I will say no word to their hurt; but 'tis strange that my boy found the feathers of the drake I lost during father's funeral, behind their cow-byre."

"And who was it," Yuzka asked, "that made off with our bedding that very same day?"

"When is their suit against the Voyt to come off?"

"Not so soon. But Ploshka is for them, and they will make things hot for the Voyt and his wife."

"Ploshka was ever a meddler with other folk's matters."

"Our friend, hoping to become Voyt, is currying favour everywhere."

Here Yankel passed by, dragging and pulling at the mane of a hobbled horse, that lashed out and resisted with all its might and they laughed and made merry at his expense.

"Oh, 'tis well for you that ye can laugh! What trouble I have with the beast!"

"Stuff it with straw, fix a new tail on it, and take it to some fair: it will never do as a horse, but ye may sell it for a cow!" the smith bawled. Their laughter became a roar, for the horse had jerked himself free, leaped into the pond, and, in spite of threats and entreaties, lain down wallowing in the water.

"A remarkable brute. Bought of a gipsy, no doubt?"

"Set a pail of vodka before it: ye may then perhaps tempt it out!" joined in the organist's wife, who sat by the pond, watching a flock of ducklings, as downy as yellow catkins, while a hen ran cackling along the bank in dismay.

"'Tis a fine lot.—From the Koziols, I suppose?"

"Yes. But they are always running away to the pond." And she tried to call them back, flinging them handfuls of Turkish wheat into the water.



Seeing them, however, making for the other bank, she went after them in a hurry.

As soon as they had arrived, and Hanka was busy over the breakfast, the blacksmith set to prowl about every corner of the cabin and all the premises, even exploring the potatoes. At last Hanka could not help observing:

"Think ye any potatoes are missing?"

"I never," he answered, "buy a pig in a poke."

"Ye know the place of everything better than I do myself," she said, stiffly, pouring out the coffee. "Come, Dominikova! Come, Yagna! Come and join us!"

For those two had, on arriving, shut themselves up in the opposite room.

No one was at first willing to open the conversation. Hanka, extremely cautious and guarded, pressed them all to eat, and poured out coffee abundantly, but kept her eyes carefully all the time on the smith, who was prying about from his place, darting glances in every direction, and clearing his throat again and again. Yagna sat louting and mournful, her eyes glistening as if they had been quite recently full of tears. At her side, Dominikova talked in whispers. Yuzka was the only one to chatter freely, which she did just as usual, as she flew from one pot to another, full of boiling potatoes.

After a long tedious pause, the smith broached the subject.

"Well. How shall we divide the property?"

Hanka gave a start; but she at once recovered herself, and replied with calm and evidently after having thought it out well:

"How are we to divide it at all? I am here only to watch over my goodman's estate, and have no power to decide aught. When Antek returns, he will see to the division."

"But when will he come back? And things cannot drag on so."

"They must! As they did during Father's illness, so they shall until Antek's return."

"But he is not the only inheritor."

"But, he being the eldest son, the land comes down to him from his father."

"He has not more right to it than any of us."

"Ye also may have your share of the land, if Antek prefers it so. I shall not quarrel over this with you: the decision is not mine."

"Yagna!" her mother urged; "say a word about your claim."

"Why should I? They know of it well enough."

Hanka turned a deep red, and kicked Lapa, that had curled up beneath her feet. She hissed between her clenched teeth:

"Aye, the wrong done to us, we remember it well!"

"As you say. Wild words are of no account here, but the six acres are—those made over to Yagna by her late Goodman."

"If the deed of gift is in your hands, none can snatch it away," Magda growled angrily. She had hitherto been sitting speechless and giving suck to her baby.

"True; and we have it duly signed and attested."

"Well, all must wait, and Yagna with the rest."

"Of course. But she may take away her personal belongings at once: her cow, her calf, her swine, her geese . . ."

"No!" the smith interrupted in a hard voice. "All those things are common property, and to be shared equally by all."

"By all? Is that your will? No one can take from her my wedding-present!" And, raising her voice, "Perchance," she cried, "ye would likewise divide her petticoats amongst you—and her feather-bed likewise . . . eh?"

"I did but jest; and ye fly out at me at once!"

"Because I know you to the bottom of your heart!"

"But now," he went on, "to what purpose is all this prating? You are right, Hanka; we must needs wait till Antek comes back.—And I have presently to go in haste and meet the Squire: I am stayed for." And he rose.



But, having caught sight of his father-in-law's sheepskin, hanging in the corner, he offered to pull it down.

"This would be just the thing for me."

"Touch it not: it is hanging there to dry," Hanka said.

"Well, then, let me have those boots. Only the uppers are in good condition, and they too are patched," he pleaded, trying to get them down.

"Not one thing is to be touched. Should you take aught, they will say that half of the household goods have been carried off. Let an inventory be made first, and officially. Till then, I will not allow one stake to come out of a hedge."

"Ha!" said Magda; "but Father's bedding is gone, and will not be down in the inventory."

"I have told you what came to pass. Directly after his death, I spread it on the hedge to air; and one came by night and stole it. . . . I could not see to everything, all alone."

"Strange that a thief should have been so ready at hand!"

"Do you mean by that I am lying now, and stole it then?"

"Be quiet, Magda, no quarreling. . . . He that stole it, let him have his winding-sheet cut out of it!"

"Why, the feathers alone weighed thirty pounds!"

"Hold your tongue, I say!" the blacksmith shouted at his wife, and asked Hanka to come out with him into the farm-yard: he wished, he said, to look at the swine.

She went with him, but well on her guard.

"I would fain give you good advice."

She listened attentive, wondering what it could be.

"Ye must, one of these evenings, and ere the inventory is made, drive two of the kine to my byre. We can entrust the sow to our cousin, and stow away all we can at our acquaintances'.—I will let you know with whom.—Ye will declare in the inventory that the corn has all been sold to Yankel: give him a couple of bushels, and he will bear witness to anything. The miller will take one colt, and it may

feed in his paddock. Of the vessels and implements, some may be hidden among the potatoes, some in the rye-fields. . . . 'Tis friendly advice I am giving you! . . . They all do the same—all that are not fools. . . . You have been working to death: 'tis just ye should get a larger share. . . . To me you need only give a few crumbs. And fear nothing: I will help you through the whole business; aye, and make it my affair, too, that ye shall get all the land for your own! . . . Only hearken to me: none can give better advice than I.—Why, even the Squire takes mine gladly.—Well, what say you?"

She answered in slow tones, looking at the man steadfastly and with scorn:

"Thus much: even as I will give up naught that's mine, so too am I not covetous of aught else!"

He staggered as if from a stunning blow—then glared at her in fury and hissed:

"Besides, I would not breathe a word to anyone of how ye despoiled the old man!"

"Breathe what ye choose to whom ye choose!—But I will tell Antek of your advice, and he shall speak to you on the matter!"

He scarcely could swallow down an imprecation. But he only spat on the ground, and walked off hurriedly, calling to his wife through the open window:

"Magda, have an eye to all things, lest there be yet more thefts here!"

But as he passed, with what disdain Hanka eyed him!

Maddened by her scorn, he made off, but meeting the Voyt's wife, who just entered the enclosure, stopped to confer with her for some time, angrily and with clenched fists.

She came bringing an official document with her.

"'Tis for you, Hanka: the policeman has brought it in from the bureau."

"About Antek, perchance!" she thought in great trepidation, taking the paper in her apron-covered hand.

"I think it concerns Gregory. My goodman is out—



gone to the District office—and the policeman only said there was something about Gregory being dead, or . . .”

“Jesu Maria!” Yuzka shrieked, and Magda started to her feet in horror.

Helplessly, seized with overwhelming fear, they turned the ominous paper about.

“You perhaps, Yagna, could understand it,” Hanka said beseechingly.

They stood round her, choking with suspense and dread; but Yagna, after a long try at spelling it out, gave up the attempt.

“I cannot read it: ’tis not written in our language.”

“Nor penned in her presence either!” the Voyt’s wife sneered. “Other things there are, however, in which she is more learned!”

“Go ye your ways,” Dominikova snarled, “and let quiet folks be.”

But the Voyt’s wife would not miss the opportunity to strike a blow at her.

“Ye are good at rebuking your neighbours. But ye had better have kept your daughter from lying in wait for other women’s husbands!”

“Peace, peace, good woman,” Hanka interfered, foreseeing what was coming; but the Voyt’s wife only grew more enraged.

“Oh, I will say my say now, if never again!—Her, who has poisoned my life so, I never will forgive till my dying day!”

“Well, then, say your say! A cur will bark louder than you can!” Dominikova growled. She took it coolly, but Yagna flushed red as a beet-root. Yet, though overwhelmed with shame, she nevertheless took refuge in reckless stubbornness; and as if to spite the other, she held her head up, and fastened her eyes upon her enemy with a taunting expression and a malicious smile.

The look, the smile, infuriated the other, and she denounced her lubricity in a torrent of invectives.

"Your words are frenzy, you are drunk with hate!" the old dame said, to draw her anger away; "your husband will answer grievously before God for my daughter's misfortune."

"Misfortune!—Aye, 'tis an innocent young maiden he has seduced! . . . Ha, such a maiden that with everyone and under every green bush . . ."

"Hold your wicked tongue, or—blind as I am—my hands will surely find their way to your hair!" the old woman cried threateningly, her hand tightening its grasp on her stick.

"Oh, will you try?—Only touch me! Only dare!" she repeated, with a defiant scream.

"Ha! will she, who has waxed fat upon wrongs done to her neighbours, venture now to beset and pester them—as hard to shake off as a bur?"

"Say, you, in what thing have I ever done you wrong?"

"That you will know, when your husband shall be condemned to jail!"

The Voyt's wife rushed at her with lifted fists; but Hanka caught her back, and said sternly to them both:

"Women, for God's sake!—Would ye turn my cabin into a tavern?"

This instantly put a stop to their brawl. Both breathed hard and were panting. Tears came streaming from under the bandages that covered Dominikova's eyes, but she was first to come back to her senses, and say, sitting down with hands clasped and a deep sigh:

"God be merciful to me a sinner!"

The Voyt's wife had rushed out in a fury; but, returning, she put her head in at the window, crying out to Hanka:

"I tell you, drive that wanton from your house! And do so while there yet is time, lest you rue it sorely! Let her not stay one hour more beneath your roof, or that hell-born pest will make you go yourself! O Hanka, defend yourself—and for that, be merciless, be without pity for her. She is only lying in wait to entrap your Antek. . . . Don't you see what a hell she now prepares for you?" She leant



further into the room and, stretching her fist towards Yagna, shouted with the most intense hatred:

"Yet a little, yet a little, you devil from hell! I shall not die in peace, I shall not go to Holy Confession, until I have seen you driven with cudgels out of Lipka!—Oh, get you away to the soldiers, you drab, you swinish jade! Your place is with them!"

She was gone, and over the cabin there came a silence like that of the grave. Dominikova shook with a dumb passion of weeping; Magda rocked her little one; Hanka, plunged in torturing thought, looked into the fire; and Yagna, though she still had on her face the same hardened reckless expression, the same wicked smile, had turned as white as a sheet. Those last words had cut deep into her soul; she felt stabbed as though by a hundred knives, each stab streaming with her life-blood: an inhuman torment that was impelling her to shriek out at the top of her voice, or even dash her brains out against the wall. But she controlled herself, pulled her mother by the sleeve, and said in an agonized whisper:

"Mother, come away. Let's flee this place. And quickly!"

"Right; for I am broken and shattered. But you must return and watch over what is yours."

"I will not stay here! I so loathe the place that to stay is beyond me.—Why did I ever darken these doors? Better have broken a limb than have ever come here!"

"Were you, then, so evilly dealt with?" Hanka asked quietly.

"Worse than a chained-up dog! Even in hell there must be less pain than I have suffered here!"

"Strange, then, that you could bear it so long: no one imprisoned you here. You were free as air to go!"

"So I will. And may the plague choke you, for being—what you are!"

"Curse not, or I may cast my own wrongs in your teeth!"

"Why are ye all—as many as dwell in Lipka—all of you against me?"

"Live rightly: none will say one word of bitterness to you!"

"Peace, Yagna, peace; Hanka bears you no malice!"

"Let her too howl with the rest. Aye, let her! As dogs, dirt to me is all their howling. And what have I done to them? Whom have I robbed or slain?"

"What have ye done? Have you the front to ask?" Hanka exclaimed, in stupefaction, standing up opposite her. "Do not drive me too far, or I may speak!"

"Speak, prithee! I dare you to speak! What do I care for you?" Yagna vociferated, now in a towering passion, that spread within her like a conflagration; and she was ready to do anything—even the very worst that offered.

The tears had instantly sprung to Hanka's eyes at the remembrance of Antek's infidelity, that rose up before her with a pang so acute that she could hardly stammer out:

"What have ye done with him—with my husband, say? Ye never would let him be, but followed him everywhere, like the rampant piece of lust ye are!" . . . Her breath failed her, and she broke into sobs.

Like a she-wolf set upon in her den, at bay, and ready to tear anything she meets with to pieces, Yagna sprang up. Burning with the most furious hate, and frenzied to the uttermost extreme of rage, she lashed her adversary with stinging words, that came each of them from her lips like the strokes of a whip.

"Indeed?—So 'twas I who pursued your man, was it? Yet there is none but knows how I always drove him from me! How, like a cur, he would whine outside my door, that he might have but the mere sight of a shoe of mine!—Yes, and he took hold of me by force, till I was bereft of sense, and let him do all his will, for my brains whirled.—And now will I tell you all the truth . . . but you will rue the telling! He loved me—loved me more than tongue can tell! And you he shrank from, even to loathing; his gorge, poor man! rose at the thought of your love; 'twas in his throat, as rancid reasty fat, ancient and musty and unbearable; and at the memory of you, he would spit with sheer disgust!



Nay, not to see you any more, he willingly would have done himself a harm. . . . You sought the truth; you have it now!—And, moreover, I will tell you—and do not forget it—if I should but say the word, when you would kiss his feet, he'd spurn you from him, and go following me throughout the world!—So weigh my words, and never dare to think yourself my equal.—Have you understood?"

Towards the end, though loud and passionate in speech, she had become mistress of herself, fearless, and more beautiful than ever. Even her mother listened to her with astonishment, mingled with dread; for now another woman stood revealed before her, as terrible, as evil, and as dangerous as the dark cloud that bears the lightning within it.

Her words pierced Hanka, wounded her almost to death. They struck her without mercy, crushed and trampled her down. She felt strengthless, mindless, almost as unconscious as a tree that falls struck by the thunderbolt. She was scarcely able to breathe; her lips grew very white, and she sank back on a bench. Her anguish, it seemed to her, was rending her to pieces—nay, crushing her to grains of barren sand: even the tears had vanished from her face, grown ashy with the throes of that fierce ordeal, though her bosom still was shaken with deep dry sobs. She stared out into space as if in terror—into the abyss which had opened suddenly before her eyes; and she trembled as trembles an ear of corn, that the wind whirls on to destruction.

Yagna had long ago gone with her mother to the other side of the house; Yuzka was with the ducklings at the mill-pond; but Hanka still sat motionless in the same place, like a bird bereft of her fledgelings, unable to scream out, to defend itself, to flee anywhither, only now and then stirring its wings, and uttering a mournful cry.

But Heaven had pity on her and granted her a little relief. She came to herself again, knelt down before the holy pictures, and with abundant tears made a vow to go on pilgrimage to Chenstohova, if what she had heard should prove untrue.

She was not even angry with Yagna any more; she only

dreaded her; and, hearing her voice now and then, crossed herself, as if to keep off a fiend.

Then she set to work. Her experienced hands worked almost as deftly as usual, little as her thoughts accompanied them; but she never remembered that she took the children out of doors and set the cabin in order that day.—At length, having prepared dinner and placed it in vessels for the field-labourers, she sent it to them by Yuzka.

And now, being quite alone, and no longer agitated, she sat down to reflect over every word said. Intelligent and kind-hearted though she was, she could not put from her mind the blows dealt at her self-respect as a wife; more than once their memory made her burn with indignation, and her heart writhed under the torment it gave her; more than once the thought of some awful revenge filled her mind. But at last she came to this conclusion:

"Truly, as to good looks, there is no comparison between me and her. But I am his wedded wife; I am the mother of his children"; and her confidence returned at the thought.

"And should he even go astray after her, he will return again to me!—And at any rate," she added to comfort herself, looking out of the window, "he can never marry her!"

Afternoon was melting into evening, when the thought of a step that must be taken flashed suddenly across Hanka's mind. She considered for a minute or two, leaning against the wall; then, wiping her eyes, she strode out into the passage, flung open the door of Yagna's room, and said, loud but calmly:

"Get out, out!—Out of this cabin instantly!"

Yagna, starting up from her settle, faced her for many seconds with a steady look. Then Hanka, taking a step or two back from the threshold, repeated in a hoarse voice:

"Take yourself away this instant, else will I have you thrown out by our farm-servant!—This instant!" she said once more, with stern emphasis.

Here the old dame would have interfered, eager to bring forward explanations and excuses; but Yagna merely shrugged her shoulders.



"Not a word to her—to that wretched wisp of straw! We know what she would have."

She took a paper out of the bottom of a chest.

"'Tis the donation you'd have back, and the six acres therewith: take them, eat them, fill your belly with them!"

Flinging the paper in her face, she added scornfully:

"And choke yourself to death in the eating!"

Then, paying no heed to her mother's remonstrances, she speedily set about packing up all her things and carrying them outside.

Hanka felt dizzy, as if she had received a blow between the eyes; but she picked up the paper, and said, threatening her:

"Quicker than that, or I will set the dogs on you!"

Meanwhile, she nevertheless felt overwhelmed with amazement. What! throw away six whole acres of land as one might cast away a broken pot?—How could she? The woman must be moonstruck, she thought, and eyed her over with astonishment.

Yagna, paying no more attention to her, was now taking down her own pictures, when Yuzka entered with a loud outcry.

"Give up the coral necklaces: they are mine from my mother—mine—mine—mine!"

Yagna was just unfastening them, but stopped.

"No," she answered, "I will not. Matthias gave them to me: mine they are!"

Yuzka shrieked and stormed, until Hanka was forced to silence her. Then all became calm again; Yagna seemed to have become deaf and dumb. After having taken all her things out, she hurried away to get her brother's help.

Dominikova made no further opposition, but replied to no word either from Hanka or from Yuzka. Only, when all her daughter's things were on the cart, she rose and shook her fist, and said:

"May the worst of all possible fates not pass you by!"

Hanka winced under the curse, but took it quietly, and called after her: "When Vitek brings the cattle home, he'll

drive your cow to your hut. And send someone for all the rest in the evening, to drive them home to you."

She gazed for a long time upon them as they departed in silence, wending their way round the pond. She had no leisure for reflection, for the hired labourers came in presently: so she stowed the deed away carefully in her chest, under lock and key. But she was subdued and depressed the whole evening, and it was with but small pleasure that she listened to Yagustynka's praises of what she had done.

Then, after the men had returned once more to their work, she took Yuzka with her to weed the flax, which was in places quite yellow with wild flowers. She worked with great diligence to shake off old Dominikova's menaces from her mind; but unsuccessfully; and she was especially uneasy about what Antek would say on his return.

"How he will knit his brows when I show him the deed!—Oh, the fool!—Six whole acres! 'tis all but a farm by itself."

"Ah! Hanka," Yuzka cried, "we have forgotten the letter about Gregory!"

"Aye, so we have.—Yuzka, leave off your work: I shall go to the priest and ask him to read it."

The priest, however, was not within doors, and when she saw him at a distance among the field-workers, with his cassock taken off, she felt afraid he might rebuke her publicly for her act. "For no doubt," she thought, "he must know about it by this time." So she went to the miller, who was just then trying how the sawmill worked, along with Matthew.

"My wife told me just how ye have smoked out your stepmother. Ha, ha! Ye look like a wagtail, but have the claws of a hawk!" Laughing, he set to read the letter, but at the first glance at it, he cried out: "Oh, what awful news!—Your Gregory has been drowned.—'Twas as far back as Eastertide. . . . They write that ye can get his things by applying at the District Office."

"Gregory dead!—So strong a man!—And so young!—He



was not over twenty-six.—And was to have come back this harvest-time.—Drowned! O merciful Jesus!" she moaned, wringing her hands at the mournful news.

"Well," Matthew remarked, with bitter animosity, "heritages seem to be coming your way. Ye have but now to turn Yuzka out upon the world, and the whole estate will be yours and the blacksmith's!"

"Are ye already off with the old love of Teresa, and on with Yagna's new love?" she interrupted him; and thereupon he was suddenly absorbed in the machinery, while the miller burst into a loud guffaw.

"Oh, what a good tit for tat!—And what a brave little woman!"

On her way home, she dropped in to tell Magda, who wept copiously, and uttered many an ejaculation of grief:

"'Tis the will of the Lord. . . . Ah! a man like an oak-tree. . . . Few his equals in all Lipka! . . . Oh, lot of man, oh, unhappy lot!—Here to-day, gone to-morrow! . . . Then his belongings go to his family: Michael will go to the office to-morrow and fetch them. . . . Poor fellow! And he so eager to be home again!"

"All is in God's hands. . . . He was always unlucky with water. Remember how once he was near drowning in the pond, and was saved by Klemba. . . . Surely it was written that he should die no other death!"

They mourned together, and wept—and parted; for they both, and Hanka especially, had plenty of work to do.

The news spread about very fast. The men who came back from the fields were already talking about Gregory and Yagna: all heartily sorry for the one, but not all for the other: concerning her, opinions were divided. The women (the older ones in particular) were very decidedly on Hanka's side, and violently hostile to Yagna; while the men, though hesitatingly, inclined to take the other's part. This even gave rise to some disputes.

Matthew, on his way home from the sawmill, heard them talk. At first he merely spat in token of contempt, or let

out a curse under his breath; but, hearing what they said outside Ploshka's hut, he could not help crying out indignantly:

"Hanka had no right to expel her: she has property there of her own."

Here Ploshka's wife, red-faced and stout of figure, turned upon him.

"Nay," she cried, "'tis well known that Hanka does not deny her right to the land. But she has other fears, for Antek may come home any day. Who can watch a thief living in the house? Was she to sit still and take no heed of their doings? Was she?"

"Fiddlesticks! all that has naught to do with the case. Your unbridled tongues are wagging, not for the sake of justice, but from envy and spite!"

When you thrust a stick into a wasps' nest, they all fly out at you: so did the women at him.

"Oh, indeed! what is there in her to envy, say? That she's a light-o'-love and a wanton? That ye all run after her like dogs? That you long for her, every one of you? That she is a cause of sin and a shame to all the village? Shall we envy her those things?"

"Perchance ye do: ye are beyond man's understanding. Worn-out old besoms ye are, who would hate the very light of the sun! Had she but been like that Magda, the tavern wench, and done the worst of things, you would have forgiven her; but simply because she is the fairest of all, you'd all like to drown her—aye, and in a spoonful of water too!"

This caused such a storm that he was glad to make his escape, crying as he went:

"Ye foul jades, may your tongues rot in your heads!"

Passing by Dominikova's house, he looked in at the open window. The room was lit, but Yagna could not be seen, and he was unwilling to go in; so he regretfully passed on to his own hut, on his way to which he was met by Veronka.

"Ah, I was at your home just now.—Staho has dug the new foundations and made the trunks ready, so that you



might cut them into shape now; when are ye coming?"

"On Tib's eve perhaps. I am disgusted with this village, and may any day throw everything up—and go over the hills and far away!" he cried angrily, as he went past.

"Something," she wondered, as she went her way to Boryna's, "must have stung the man pretty sharply: what can it be?"

Supper was done, and Hanka told her all at leisure. Yagna's expulsion interested her deeply; but on hearing of Gregory, she only observed:

"His death will make one the fewer to share the property."

"It will.—I never thought of that."

"And with what the Squire has to give for the forest, you will get hard upon seventeen acres apiece! . . . To think of it! Even other folk's death is a gain to those already rich!" she sighed ruefully.

"What care I for wealth?" said Hanka. But when she went to bed, and thought the matter over, she felt a secret joy in her heart.

And afterwards, kneeling down for her evening prayer, she said resignedly:

"Since he has died, it is the will of our Lord." And she prayed fervently for his eternal rest.

The next day, about noon, Ambrose came to her cabin.

"Where have ye been?" she inquired.

"At the Koziols'. A child there has been scalded to death. She called me in, but there is naught needed for it save a coffin and a few clods."

"Which of them is it?"

"The younger of the two that she brought from Warsaw this spring. It fell into a tub of boiling water, and was all but boiled."

"Those foundlings, as it seems, do not get on with her."

"They do not.—But she is no loser: the funeral expenses are paid.—I came to you on another business, however."

She looked at him uneasily.

"Dominikova, you must know, has gone to the law court

with Yagna—to complain of your having turned her out, I suppose.”

“Let her. I do not care.”

“They went to confession this morning, and had later a long conference with the priest. I could not catch half they said against you, but what they said made him shake his fist with anger!”

“A priest—to poke his nose into other folk’s business!” she blurted out. All day long, however, the tidings stuck in her memory painfully; she was full of fears and evil surmises, and quite at a loss what to do.

At nightfall, a cart stopped in front of her cabin. She ran out, breathless and terrified; but it was only the Voyt, sitting there behind his horses.

“You know about Gregory already,” he began. “’Tis a calamity; but there’s nothing to be said.—Now I have also some good news for you. To-day—or to-morrow at the latest—ye shall see Antek again.”

“Are ye not beguiling me?” she asked; the news was too good to believe.

“When the Voyt tells you so, ye may believe him. They informed me in the Bureau.”

“’Tis well he comes back; it was high time indeed,” she returned, coolly; it seemed, with no joy at all. And then the Voyt, after a moment’s reflection, began talking to her as a friend.

“That’s a bad business ye have made with Yagna! She has laid a complaint against you, and may make you smart for having used violence and taken the law into your own hands. Ye had no right to expel her from her own apartment.—A pretty thing it will be, when Antek comes back, and ye are thrown into jail for it, both of you!—Now take my sincere friendly advice: make matters up. I’ll do all I can to get the complaint withdrawn; but ye must yourself make amends for the injury done.”

Hanka stood erect before him, and told him her mind thus:



"Are you speaking as the defender of my victim, or of your mistress?"

His whip struck the horses so hard that they bounded away at a gallop.



© Jan Bulhak

THE REMAINS OF THE BENEDICTINE CONVENT OF TYNIEC, OVERHANGING THE  
VISTULA NEAR KRAKOW

## CHAPTER IV

HANKA could not sleep a wink that night, after such manifold and painful experiences. She continually thought that she heard someone creeping about the premises, along the road, or even close to the cabin. She listened. All the inmates were sleeping sound. The night was still, though the trees murmured; but not very dark, for the stars gave a dim light.

It was stiflingly close within. The ducklings, put to rest under the bed, smelt unpleasantly, but Hanka would not throw the window open. Her bed and pillows were hot beneath her, burning hot; she tossed from side to side, more and more agitated, full of multitudinous thoughts swarming in her brain, and drenching her with streaming sweat. At last, her fears growing uncontrollable, she started out of bed, and went out barefoot, in her shift, and bearing a hatchet, that she had snatched up at random—out into the yard.

Everything stood wide open there. Pete lay sprawling outside the stable, snoring hard. The horses were munching their provender and clinking their halter-chains; the cows, that had not been tethered for the night, either wandered about the yard or lay chewing the cud with moist dripping muzzles, and lifting towards Hanka their ponderous horned heads and the dark balls of their unfathomable eyes.

She went back to her bed and lay down open-eyed, listening attentively, and at times quite sure that she could hear voices and distant steps.

"Peradventure the folk of some cabin hard by are awake and talking," she said, attempting to explain matters; but no sooner had the panes turned grey from black than she



rose and went out again, this time with Antek's sheepskin thrown over her.

In the porch, Vitek's stork was standing asleep, with one leg drawn up under him, and his head thrust beneath his wing; and their flock of geese, huddled together in the enclosure, formed a dim white mass.

The fields beyond were flooded with low-lying greyish fogs, out of which only the highest tree-tops surged, like pillars of thick black smoke.

The pond glistened in the darkness like a huge sightless eye, fringed with lashes of alders that rustled around it, while all the neighbourhood slept, wrapt in the fog's opaque invisibility.

Hanka sat down close to the house, leant back against the wall, and fell into a doze. When she again opened her eyes, she saw with astonishment that the night had gone; the clouds were all burning red like a distant conflagration.

"If he has but started early enough, he will be here directly," she said to herself, looking down the road. Her short spell of slumber had so much refreshed her that, to while the time away till sunrise, she took out the children's clothes to wash in the pond, while the light grew stronger and stronger.

The first cock crowed, quickly followed by others, making a loud noise throughout the village. Some larks too were heard, but at rare intervals, while the whitewashed walls and the empty dew-drenched roads gradually became distinct.

Hanka was busy washing, when a sound of stealthy steps drew her attention; and as she looked around curiously, a shadow passed out of Balcerek's enclosure and slung away among the trees.

"Yes—'tis a visitor to Mary! who can it be?" She could by no means make sure, for the shadow had vanished directly. "Ah! So proud a girl! One so vain of herself and her beauty—to let in a sweetheart by night!—Who would have thought it?"

She was scandalized. On looking about her again, she

perceived the miller's man, gliding by, at the other end of the village.

"He is coming home, no doubt, from the tavern where his Magda lives!—Those men! like wolves prowling in the night!—What doings, alas!" She sighed, but a restless feeling quickened her senses now and stirred her blood. This, however, presently passed away as she went on washing in the cool water; and in a voice which, though subdued, thrilled with intense fervour, she began the hymn:

"Soon as dawn blushes in the sky,  
To Thee, O God, my voice shall cry!"

And the chant rolled over the fallen dew, and made one with the approaching daybreak.

It was time now to rise: opening windows, clattering clogs, and loud cries showed that the villagers were awakening.

Hanka spread out upon the fence all the things she had washed, and ran to wake her people. But they were so heavy with sleep that their heads but just rose and fell back on the pillow.

To her intense indignation, Pete shouted at her:

"Mother of dogs!—'Tis too early! I'll sleep till sunrise!" And he refused to stir.

The babies were crying, and Yuzka whined:

"Yet a little, Hanka dear! I went to bed but a minute ago!"

She then lulled the little ones to rest, drove the poultry into the yard, waited patiently for a few minutes more, and then—just before the sun had risen, when the heights of heaven were one mass of flame, and the mill-pond reddened in the dawn—she returned to the charge, and made such a din and uproar that the sleepers could not but get out of bed. And when Vitek came scratching himself drowsily, and rubbing his back against the corner of the hut, she chastised him well with sharp words.

"You'll wake up fast enough with a first-rate drubbing!—Aye, and why, you young hound! why did you not



fasten the kine to the mangers last night? Would you have them gore each other's bellies in the dark, hey?"

He answered her back, but whipped out of sight in time, for she made a fierce rush at him. Then, looking again into the stable, she set upon Pete:

"The horses are mumbling their empty racks!—And you! you are lying abed even till sunrise! O you idle one!"

"Ye scream as a magpie ere it is to rain," he growled back. "Why, all the village can hear your noise!"

"Let them hear! Let them all know what a sluggard, what a lazy drone, what a dawdler you are!—Oh, but the master will be back now, and he'll keep you in order, I promise you!"

"Yuzka!" she now shouted from the other end of the yard. "Spotted One's udders are swollen hard: milk her carefully, and let not half the milk remain, as you did last time.—Vitek! take your breakfast and be off; and if you let the sheep stray—as you did yesterday—I'll know the reason why!" . . . So she went about, giving orders, bustling everywhere, and all the time hard at work herself: feeding the fowls, and the swine that were standing close to the cabin; giving a pail of thin batter to drink to the calf just weaned; throwing the ducklings boiled groats, and driving them off to the mill-pond. Vitek received a slap on the back, and his food in a wallet. Nor was the stork forgotten; she set a pipkin before him, full of potatoes cooked the day before; and he *klek-kleked*, plunged his beak in, and ate with a hearty appetite. Hanka was everywhere, and seeing to everything, and managing all in the best way.

As soon as Vitek had gone off with the cows and sheep, she went over to Pete, whom she could not bear to see idling about.

"Take all the dung out of the byre!" she ordered; "it is bad for the cows at night, and fouls them all over: they're as filthy as swine."

Just then the sun's red burning eye peeped at them from

afar, and the *Komorniki* arrived to pay with their work for the flax and potato-fields they had rented.

She set Yuzka to peeling potatoes, gave suck to her babies, put her apron on over her head, and said:

"Keep an eye on everything here! And should Antek come, let me know: I shall be in the cabbage-field.—Come, good folk, while it is still cool and dewy. We shall first earth up the cabbages, and set to yesterday's work again after breakfast."

As they walked on down by the old disused peat-diggings, a few lapwings circled over their heads and some storks were wading about the low marshy ground, stepping carefully, and thrusting their heads forward. In the air there was a marshy smell, mixed with that of the sweet flag and the sedges, with clumps of which the old peat-diggings were overgrown.

Then they set to work, beginning their talk (of course with the inexhaustible topic of the weather) while they earthed up the cabbage-plants, that had grown well, but were greatly infested with weeds—towering dandelions, rank duckweeds, and even forests of thistles.

"What man needs not nor sows, most abundantly grows," said one woman, knocking the earth from the roots of a weed.

"And all evil things likewise," said another; "sin is sown by none, yet the world is full thereof."

"Because its life is sturdy!" Yagustynka struck in, to air her peculiar views. "My dear! so long as man lives, sin shall live. Do they not say: 'If sin you destroy, you kill all our joy'? and again: 'But for sin dearly cherished, long ago man had perished.'—It must, then, be good for something, just as this weed is: our Lord made them both!"

This theology was sternly rebuked by Hanka. "What! . . . Our Lord make evil? It is only man that, like a swine, mars all things with his rooting snout." And they said no more.

The sun was up in the sky now, and the mists had all



disappeared, when troops of other women came along from the village.

Hanka laughed at them.

"Fine workers! Waiting till the dew shall dry, lest they wet their feet!"

"Not all are so eager for work as you are."

"And not all are forced to work so hard," she answered with a sigh.

"Well, your goodman is coming back: then will ye rest."

"I have vowed, if he returns, to go to Chenstohova for the day of Our Lady of Angels. And the Voyt tells me he is coming to-day."

"The folk at the Bureau must know: so the news will be true.—But what a number of people are off to Chenstohova on foot this year! The organist's wife is to be a pilgrim too, they say; and she tells me that the priest is to come with the pilgrimage."

Yagustynka made fun of the idea. "Who will carry his guts for him? He will never do so by himself.—Nay, 'tis only a promise, as usual with him."

"I have been there several times, with the others, and should long to go every year," sighed Filipka—she from over the water.

"Everyone longs for a spell of idleness."

"Oh, heavens!" she went on, paying no attention to the jeer; "'tis all delight: everything along the road is so pleasant, so sweet to look on! And ye gaze out upon the world, and hear so much, and pray so much besides! . . . And one thinks for a few weeks that one has got rid of all woes and all cares. One feels as though born again!"

"True, and many have told me the same," said Hanka. "One is specially under the loving influence of God's grace."

A girl was hastening towards them, slipping along between the bulrushes and the thick clumps of alder. Hanka shaded her eyes, looked, saw it was Yuzka, and heard her from afar crying, as she waved her arms:

"Hanka, Hanka! Antek is home!"

She flung down her hoe, and sprang up as if about to fly away like a bird; but she mastered her feeling, let down her skirt which she had tucked up, and, in spite of her rapture and her throbbing heart that made her almost unable to speak, said as quietly as if she had not heard any news at all:

"You will go on working without me, and come round to the cabin for breakfast."

The women looked at one another.

"Her calm," Yagustynka said, "is only outside, lest folk should laugh at her for wanting her goodman so badly.—I could not have mastered myself so!"

"Nor I!—But God grant that Antek do not go wrong any more!"

"As he will now no longer have Yagna at close quarters, it may be that he will keep straight."

"O my dear! when a man scents a petticoat, he'll follow it all over the world!"

"'Tis a truth. There's no beast so greedy to its own hurt as some men are."

So they talked, letting the work flag and all but come to a standstill. Hanka meanwhile went on, conversing both with Yuzka and everyone she met, though she knew but little of what either she said to them or they to her.

"Has Roch come with him?" she would ask again and again.

"How many a time have I told you yes?"

"And how is he looking?—How?"

"How can I tell you that?—In he came and asked at the very threshold: 'Where's Hanka?' So I told him and ran to fetch you—and that's all."

"And he asked after me!—May the Lord . . . ! May he . . ." She was incoherent, beside herself with gladness.

From a distance she perceived him, sitting with Roch in the porch, and as soon as he saw her, he went out to meet her in the enclosure.

She advanced more and more slowly, catching at the roadside fence not to fall, for her legs were giving way



under her. She felt choked with sobs, and her brain whirled so, she could only utter these words:

"You here!—Here at last!"—And she could speak no more for the tears of joy that choked her.

"Here at last, Hanka dear!" He clasped her to his breast in a mighty hug, full of the deepest affection and love. She nestled to his side with an uncontrollable impulse, while her happy tears went streaming down her pale cheeks, and her lips trembled, and she surrendered herself all to him with childlike simplicity.

It was long before she could speak at all; but, indeed, how could any speech ever express what she felt? She would have knelt to him, kissed the dust at his feet; and when a word or two burst from her lips, they were but like flowers falling before him as an offering, fragrant with happiness, bedewed with her heart's blood; and these her faithful eyes, brimming over with illimitable love, would lay down at his feet, with the fidelity of a dog that lives only in his master's will and favour.

"You do look poorly, dearest Hanka!" he said, stroking her face with the tenderest affection.

"No wonder, having suffered so much and waited so long!"

"Poor woman!" Roch here observed; "she has been worked sadly beyond her strength."

"Ah! and ye too are here, Roch! How could I forget you so?" And she welcomed him, and kissed his hands, while he said, with a smile:

"Very easily!—Well, I wished to bring you your goodman home; and now here he is!"

"Aye, here he is!" she cried, standing up before Antek and eyeing him in admiration. For he was so much whiter now—so much more refined in his strength—so beautiful, so lordly—as if he were someone else! She looked at him in bewilderment.

"Have I changed in aught, that your eyes examine me so?"

"No, not changed . . . and yet somehow not the same at all!"

"Oh, when I set to field-work again, I shall soon be once more just as I was!"

And now, making a dart into the hut, she came out, bearing her youngest-born.

"You see him for the first time, Antek!" she cried, as she lifted up the boy, roaring lustily. "Just look: he is as like you as two peas."

"A fine youngster!" He wrapped him up in the skirt of his capote, and rocked him to and fro.

"I have given him the name of Roch!—Here, Peter, go to Father"; and she pushed forward the other boy, who clambered on to Antek's knee, prattling childishly the while. Antek caressed him as tenderly as the other.

"Dear little things! darling mites!—How Peter has grown!—And he talks a little already . . ."

"Oh, and he takes such notice, and he's so clever! Can he but get hold of a whip, he wants at once to crack it at the geese!" She came kneeling down beside them. "Peter! Come! Try to say 'Dad'!"

He indeed said something dimly resembling the word, and continued cooing to himself, and pulling his father's hair.

"Yuzka," Antek said, "why do you eye me askant so? Come hither."

"But I dare not," she said.

"Come to me, silly one, come to me!" And he folded her in a kind brotherly embrace.

"And now you will obey me in all things, even as you did once obey Father. Fear not: I shall never be harsh to you, and from me you shall suffer no wrong."

The girl burst into a flood of tears, remembering her lost father and her brother who was drowned.

"When the Voyt told me of his death," Antek said, "I was quite stunned with grief. How dear he was to me! I never dreamed . . . And I had already arranged how we should divide the land; I had even thought of a wife for him!" he said, sorrowfully; when Roch, to turn away their thoughts from so sad a subject, exclaimed, rising from his seat:



"Talking is all very well, but not when the stomach cries famine!"

"Dear, dear! I had forgotten all about that.—Yuzka, just catch me those two yellow cockerels. . . . *Tsip, tsip, tsip!* come along! . . . Will you not begin with eggs? Or a bit of new bread, and butter made but yesterday?—Yes, cut off their heads and scald them in boiling water! . . . I shall have everything ready in a moment. . . . What a ninny I was to forget!"

"Let be, Hanka; the cocks will come in later. I would have something more homely just now; something of the country, I am so fed up with town food: give me potatoes and *barszcz* of all things!" And he laughed merrily. "Only get something else for Roch!"

"Thanks heartily; but both you and I have the same tastes as to that."

Hanka went off to get things ready. But the potatoes were on the boil by now, and she had only to fetch from the larder a huge sausage for the *barszcz*.

"This I was keeping on purpose for you, Antek. 'Tis from the pig ye sent me word to kill for Easter."

"And a splendid festoon it makes, too; though with the Lord's help, we shall get through it!—But where are the presents, Roch, say?"

The old man hauled forward a large bundle, out of which Antek took a variety of articles.

"Here's for you, Hanka, whenever you would fare anywhere." And he handed her a woollen shawl—just like the one the organist's wife had!—a black ground, with red and green chequers.

"For me! O Antek, how good of you not to forget!" she cried, overwhelmed with gratitude.

"Roch reminded me," he confessed, "or I should have forgotten. We went together to make our choices and purchases."

They had bought a great many things: he had shoes for her besides, and a silk kerchief for a head-dress: azure-blue, with tiny yellow flowers. Yuzka got another just like it,

but green; also a frill and several rows of beads, with a long ribbon to tie them. There were gingerbread cakes for the children, and mouth-organs as well; and there was even something that he set apart unopened, for the blacksmith's wife. Nor had he forgotten either Vitek or the farm-servant.

And how they all exclaimed with admiration at each new marvel as it came forth, and looked it over, and measured its size! How the tears of joy ran down Hanka's cheeks! and how Yuzka caught her head in her hands with bewildered amazement!

"Well have you deserved all these presents. Roch told me how perfectly everything has been managed on the farm.—Be quiet now, I did not come to be thanked!" he cried, for they were all crowding to embrace him in their gratitude.

"I should never have dreamed of buying any such beautiful things," Hanka said, still in the melting mood, as she tried on her new shoes. "They are a little tight for me, now I go barefoot; but in winter they will be just the thing."

Roch asked her about the doings in the village. She answered, but in a desultory way, being very busy with the food. In a short time she had set before them a large dish of boiled potatoes, plentifully seasoned with fat bacon, and another one, not a whit smaller, of *barszcz*, in which there swam a huge sausage, looking for all the world like a floating wheel.

And they fell to with an excellent appetite.

"That's the food I like," he cried, merrily; "lots of garlic to give the sausage a taste! After that, a man feels he has something inside him. But there, in jail . . . they fed me so—devil take them all!"

"Ah! poor dear! how famished you must have been!"

"Aye, aye! towards the end I had no taste for anything!"

"The boys told us only a starving dog could eat what they gave them: it is so?"

"There's some truth in that; but the worst was staying locked up. In the cold weather it was still bearable; but when the sun shone warm, and I smelt the smell of the land



—oh, then, how I raged! I even tried to tear out the window-bars; but they prevented me.”

“Is it true,” Hanka asked in a trembling voice, “that they beat folk there?”

“No doubt. But then the place is full of such villains, ’twere but justice to flog them daily.—Oh, no one ever dared to lay a finger on me! If anyone had . . . well, I’d have made short work of him.”

“Yea, in truth! Who on earth could overcome you, you mighty one?” she said, with eyes gloating over him, and attentive to the least signal he should give.

They had soon finished their meal, and went out to sleep in the barn, where Hanka had already carried them beds and pillows.

“I declare,” Antek said, laughing, “we shall both melt away like dripping in that place!”

She closed the great barn-door upon them, and then gave way to her feelings: to hide them, she went and weeded the parsley-bed, every now and then looking around her, while the tears welled up. They were tears of joy, shed—why? Because the sun beat hot upon her shoulders; because the green leaves were fluttering over her; because the birds sang, and fragrance filled her senses; and she felt so happy, so serene, so blissful within her soul!—As if she had just returned from confession—perhaps happier still!

“Thou, O Lord Jesus, hast done all this,” she murmured, raising her moist eyes to Heaven, her soul filled with the deepest and most ineffable gratitude for the great boon she had received.

“And all things have changed so wonderfully!” she sighed in ecstasy.—All the time they slept, she remained as in a sweet trance. She watched over them, as a hen does over her chickens; took the children far out into the orchard, lest they should awaken the sleepers; and drove all the animals out of the farm-yard, heedless if the pigs should root up the new potatoes, or the fowls go scratching over the sprouting cucumber-plants.

The day was painfully long, but there was no help for

that. Breakfast-time, dinner-time passed: still they slept. She sent all the people to work, caring little whether they should or should not be lazy, with her not by, and stood continually on the watch, or continually tripping between cabin and barn.

And many, many a time did she take out the things he had brought her, and try them on, and cry out:

"Is there in all the world another man so kind and so thoughtful as he is?"

At last, however, she sped away to the village; and every woman she saw she accosted with:

"Do ye know, my goodman has come back! He is sleeping in the barn now!"

Her eyes and face were radiant with smiles; everything in her breathed such joy and exhilaration that they were all astounded.

"What spell can that jail-bird have thrown over her? Why, she is beside herself about the man."

"She will grow proud and stuck-up in a very short time: you will see!"

"Oh, but let Antek go back to his old ways again, and she will be taken down finely!" So they gossiped.

Of all they said, she heard not one word.—She was back home presently, and preparing a first-class dinner. But hearing some geese scream in the pond, she ran out to silence them with a volley of stones; which nearly brought about a quarrel with the miller's wife, their owner.

She had scarcely sent the field-labourers their afternoon meal, when the two men came out of the barn. Dinner was spread for them in the cool shadow in front of the house. Beer and vodka were not lacking there, nor even a desert—half a sieve full of ripe red cherries, brought from the priest's house.

"A noble dinner!" Roch said, smiling; "quite a wedding-feast!"

"And should the Master's return be a second-rate festival?" she answered, busily serving them, and eating very little herself.



Dinner was hardly over, when Roch went out into the village, promising to look in again in the evening; and Hanka said to her husband:

"Will you look at the farm?"

"Certainly! My 'holidays' are over; I must buckle to work now.—God! how little did I think I should inherit my father's land so soon!"

He sighed, and followed her. She took him first to the stable, where three horses and a colt were snorting and stamping; then to the empty cow-byre, and the granary, full of new-mown hay. He looked into the sties too, and into the shed where all the various implements and tools were stored.

"That *britzka* must be taken in to the threshing-floor: its paint is peeling off with the heat here."

"So I told Pete more than once; but the fellow does not mind me."

She called the pigs and poultry round her, priding herself on their numbers; and then she told him about the field-work; what had been sown, and where, and how much of each crop. When she had finished, he said:

"I can hardly think that you have done all this by yourself."

"For your sake, I could have done still more!" she whispered, overjoyed at his praise; and the whisper came hot from her heart.

"You have backbone, Hanka . . . and plenty of it too!—I did not expect it of you."

"I had to, and needs must when the devil drives."

After looking about the orchard, with its half-ripe cherries, and the plots of parsley and onions, and the young cabbage-plants, they came back; and as they passed the side where his father had lived he peeped in at the window.

"And where's Yagna?" he asked, seeing with surprise that the room was empty.

"At her mother's. I turned her out," she replied in a firm voice, looking him full in the face.

He knit his brows, pondered awhile, then lit a cigarette, and said quietly and with seeming indifference:

"Dominikova is a bad animal; she will not be ousted without a lawsuit."

"I hear they both went to lodge a complaint yesterday."

"Well, well, 'between complaint and sentence, there is a good long distance'; but we must consider things well, and not let her play us any tricks."

She told him how it had all come about—of course, omitting many a detail. He heard her out, put no question, and only frowned heavily. But when she handed him the paper, he gave a sarcastic laugh.

"With that paper ye may as well . . . why, 'tis worth absolutely naught!"

"How so!—It is the very same paper your father gave her!"

"What's the use of a broken stick?—Had she annulled the deed at the notary's, that would have been something. It was in mockery she flung it to you!"

He gave a shrug, took little Peter on his arm, and made for the stile.

"I am going to look at the fields and come back," he said over his shoulder, and at the hint she stopped short, much as she had longed to go with him. As he passed the stack, now repaired and filled with new hay, he glanced at it from under heavy eyelids.

"It was repaired by Matthew!" she called out to him from the stile where she stood. "The roof alone required some scores of straw trusses."

"Good, good!" he grunted in reply, and strode away through the potatoes along the pathway, uninterested in such trifles.

The fields on that side of the village nearly all bore autumn-sown crops this year: so he met but few people, and those he met he saluted curtly, and passed on. But soon he walked more slowly, for Peter was beginning to feel heavy, and the hot still weather acted strangely upon him.



He stopped to examine almost every field in particular.

"Ha! that weed is simply choking the flax!" he cried, observing the patches of flax, azure-blue with flowers, but thickly strewn with the yellow blooms of some weed.

"She bought her linseed unsifted, and sowed it unsifted too!"

Then he stopped close to the barley, stunted, parched and scarce visible for the thistles, and camomile plants, and sorrels which grew there.

"They have sown in too wet soil.—That swine! he has ruined the field! The rascal ought to have his neck twisted for tilling the land so. And how it has been harrowed! Dog-grass and couch-grass everywhere!" He was much displeased.

But presently he came to a vast expanse of rye, waving in the sunshine, with heavy billowy ears of corn, sounding and rustling. This was a set-off: it had grown magnificently, the straw was thick in the stem, and the ears were full.

"It grows like a forest of pines! Ah, that was Father's sowing. . . . Even the Manor could show naught better!"—He plucked an ear, and rubbed it in his hands. The grain was full and fine, but soft as yet, liable to be ruined by a hailstorm.

But where he stopped longest to admire and feast his eyes was over the wheat. The growth was not quite regular—in clumps here, in hollows there—but the ears were all glossy, darkish in hue, dense-growing, and large in size.

"A first-rate crop! And, though on rising ground, it has suffered not at all from the drought. . . . 'Tis a harvest of pure gold!"

On arriving at the boundary, he gazed back. Away by the churchyard they were mowing the clover, and the scythes moved flashing over the meadows, like gleams of lightning. On the fallows flocks of geese were feeding; men swarmed about like ants; and higher and farther still he could descry lonely houses, trees hunched up, gnarled and

drooping over the roads; and again more and more vast lands fading into the distance, as into a flood of bluish trembling water.

All was hushed in profound silence; the sultry air vibrated; it was, as it were, an atmosphere of white flame, through which a stork might be seen walking up and down, or poisoning itself on dropping wings; or a crow flying past, with beak wide open, gaping with the heat.

On high there was but the intense dark azure, with a few white clouds straying across it. But below, the dry burning wind made sport: now whirling and staggering about like a drunken man; now starting up with a sudden loud whistle; or, again, lurking somewhere away out of sight, and then bursting out unexpectedly in the corn, which it teased and dashed to and fro, and drove hither and thither in lofty billows—to disappear again as suddenly, no one knew where, while the cornfields murmured in low voices, as if complaining of its rough behaviour.

Antek, having reached his fallow at the skirt of the forest, had another burst of indignation.

"Not yet ploughed up or manured! Our horses stand idle, the dung is wasted in heaps . . . and what does it matter to him, the dirty scamp?—May all . . ." he swore fiercely, drawing nigh to the cross by the poplar road.

But here, tired, slightly dizzy, and with his throat full of dust, he sat down in the shadow of the birch-trees by Boryna's Cross. Little Peter had gone to sleep: he laid him down on his capote; and then, wiping away streams of sweat from his brow, he looked out upon the landscape, and fell into a reverie.

The first afternoon shadows of the forest were hesitatingly creeping down to the corn. The tree-tops, glowing in the sun, were conversing one with another, while the thickets of hazel and aspen below shook like men sick with an ague. Woodpeckers pecked on incessantly; magpies were shrieking somewhere unseen. And at times a bee-eater would flash athwart the old moss-grown oak-trees—a flying fragment of rainbow!



A cool breath was wafted from within the quiet woodland recesses, into which the sun but rarely shot his keen darts; it came, redolent of mushrooms, of resin, of pools simmering in the hot blaze.

Suddenly a hawk was seen above the forest, circled over the fields, and, poising itself for an instant, swooped down into the corn.

Antek sprang forward to balk it, but too late: a stream of feathers was floating down, and the robber fleeing through the air, while below partridges piped plaintively, and a terrified hare fled at random, its white scut bobbing up and down.

"'Twas most featly done! A bold thief!" Antek thought, returning to his seat. "Well, hawks too must get their food somehow. Such is the law of the world!" he reflected, as he covered little Peter with his capote; for there were numberless black wild bees and bumble-bees buzzing around them.

He recalled those days of the near past, when he was longing so fiercely, with such insatiable thirst, to be back in his fields once more.

"How they tormented me, the villains!" he said with a curse. Then he became quite motionless.—Just in front of him, a few quails, calling to each other, put their heads timorously out of the rye, but popped back at once, on hearing a band of sparrows alight upon a birch-tree, fluttering, bickering, fighting, and flying down into the sand beneath, with a great racket and hubbub . . . when suddenly they all were silent, as if rooted to the spot.—The hawk flew past again, so near them that its shadow glided over the field beneath!

"Little brawlers! he has struck you dumb pretty quickly!" Antek mused. "'Tis just the same with men. How many need only a threat, and are hushed at once!"

Some wagtails came out upon the road, hopping so near that with a sweep of his hand he almost caught one of them.

"I but just missed getting one of the silly creatures for the boy."

And now crows came, one after another, flocking out of the forest, pecking at anything they could find. Scenting a man, they began, cautiously and holding their heads awry, to peer about and go round him, hopping ever nearer and nearer, and opening their gruesome beaks.

"Oh, no! I am not to be a feast for you," he laughed, throwing a clod at them; and they, like thieves found out, fled away in silence.

But after a time, while thus gazing out on the countryside, his whole soul attentive to every one of its sounds and sights, all the creatures about him began to draw near him boldly. Ants ran over his back, butterflies again and again settled in his hair, lady-birds walked about his face, and great green caterpillars of the wood explored his boots with lively interest; squirrels too, peeping forth from the forest, their brownish-red tails high in air, seemed deliberating whether they should not approach him. He, however, noticed none of them, plunged as he was in a sort of dreamy state, which the sight of the country had caused in his mind, and that filled him with indescribable sweetness.

He felt as though he were himself the very waft of the wind through the corn, the very gleam of the soft green fleece of the grass, the rolling of the streamlets over the heated sands, athwart the meadows redolent of new-mown hay; he felt himself one with the birds flying high above the earth, and crying to the sun with the great incomprehensible clamour of Life: as if he had become the murmur of the fields, the tossing of the pine-forest, the rush and mighty impetus of all growing things; also the mysterious potency of that hallowed Mother, the Earth, who brings forth all in joy and gladness. And he knew himself, knowing that he was all these things in one—both what he saw and what he felt, what he touched and understood, and what he could not even seize but by the merest glimmering—that which many a soul will only see clearly at the instant of death—besides that which only looms vaguely within the human soul, and gathers and lifts it up to the unknown region



where it weeps tears of ineffable sweetness, and yet is weighed down as with a stone by an insatiable craving.

But all these thoughts passed through his mind like clouds: before he could grasp one clearly, another had taken its place, as absorbing as the former and yet harder to understand.

He was awake, and yet he had a drowsy sense as of sleep coming to his eyes; he was led somehow into a land of ecstasy, where he felt as one feels at the most holy moment of the Holy Mass: when the soul floats away in adoration, towards some garden where angels dwell, some happy land—Paradise, or Heaven!

Though his was a hard tough nature, by no means given to sentiment, he was nevertheless, during those unearthly moments, ready to fall prostrate on the earth, kiss her with burning kisses, and take her to himself in the most loving embrace.

"What is it that has wrought upon me so? It must be the change of air—nothing else," he grunted to excuse his feelings, rubbing his eyes and knitting his brows. But indeed an overwhelming Power had seized upon him: it was by no means possible to crush down that jocund serenity which now flooded all his being.

He knew himself back in the land—*his* land—yea, the land of his father, of his forefathers: was it strange that he should feel his soul glad, and that every throb of his heart should cry out aloud and joyfully to the whole world: "Here I am once more, and here do I remain!"?

He pulled himself together, bracing himself to take up this new life, to walk in his father's ways and those of his ancestors before him: like them, he bowed his shoulders to the yoke of heavy toil, to be borne bravely, unweariedly, until little Peter should step into his place.

"It is the order of things that the young should succeed the old and the sons the fathers, one by one, continually, so long as it shall be Thy will, O merciful Jesus," he thought, in deep meditation.

He bent his head over his hands, bowing it low; for many and various thoughts had now come into his mind, mournful recollections which the accusing voice of conscience now brought before him—bitter painful truths that humbled him in the dust, as he acknowledged his multitudinous transgressions and sins.

It was a hard thing, this confession of his, and he found it no easy matter to appease his conscience; but he fought down his stubbornness, conquered his pride, and looked back on his past life with true repentance, examining every act with the utmost severity and fairness of judgment.

"I have been naught but an infamous fool!" he thought with deep sadness, while a bitter smile writhed his lips. "All in the world must take place in due order. Aye, my father spoke wisely: 'When all carts go the same way, woe to him that falls from one; he will be crushed under the wheels.'—But every man has to realize this by himself, with his own reason; and this may cost very dear indeed."

Sounds of lowing now floated from the wood; the cattle were coming home amid great volumes of dust; oxen, sheep with their attendant dogs, careful to keep them away from the corn; squealing herds of pigs, driven home with many a blow; calves plaintively seeking their lost mothers; a few herdsmen on horseback, and the others on foot with the flocks, striking, shouting, and keeping up a stream of noisy talk.

Antek had remained with Peter on one side to let them pass, when Vitek saw him and came up to kiss his hand.

"I see you have grown pretty well in these last times."

"I have in truth. The trousers I got in autumn now come but just beyond my knees."

"All will be well; be sure that Mistress will give you a new pair.—Is there grass enough for the kine?"

"Alas! no, it is all sere and drying up. If mistress had not fodder for them at home, they could give no milk at all.—Pray let me have Peter, for a little ride," he added pleadingly.



"But surely he will fall off the horse!"

"Why, no: how often and often have I taken him about on our filly! Besides, I shall be there to hold him.—How he loves riding and crying out at the horse!"—He took the boy and set him on an old jade that was plodding along with drooping head. Peter clutched at her mane with his tiny hands, smote her flanks with his bare heels, and screamed aloud with pleasure.

"A fine little fellow! O you dear boy of mine!" Antek exclaimed admiringly.

And he at once turned off from the road, taking a short cut that led straight to his barn, as the descending sun painted the sky with gold and pale emerald-green, and the wind went down, and the falling dew made the ears of corn to droop.

He walked slow, with many memories at his heels: Yagna among them, as vivid as in life. He rubbed his eyes to get rid of the vision; but in vain. In spite of him, she walked on by his side, as she once had done; and as then, she seemed to shed around her such a delightful glow that it made the blood rush to his head.

"Peradventure 'twas well Hanka drove her away! She is to me as an ulcer in the flesh—a rankling ulcer!—But the past will never be again," he said, a strange pain gnawing at his heart; and he added, with stern reproof: "My wild oats are all sown!" as he entered the enclosure.

In the yard they were busy over their evening labours, Yuzka milking the cows outside the byre and singing a shrill ditty, while Hanka made *kluski* in the porch.

As Antek went in to look over his father's apartments, his wife followed him.

"After we have set things in order here, we shall remove to this side.—Is there any lime to be had?"

"Yes, I bought some at the fair, and shall call Staho in to-morrow: he will whitewash the place.—Certainly, we shall be more comfortable here."

He peered awhile into every corner, thinking.

"Were you in the fields?" she asked him timidly.

"I was. All is in good order. Hanka, I could not have done better myself."

She coloured deeply with the pleasure of hearing him praise her.

"Only," he went on to say, "let that Pete go and feed swine, not till my ground! The good-for-nothing oaf!"

"I know him well, and have even been looking out for another farm-servant."

"Well, I shall tackle him, and—should he not be obedient—send him flying!"

Hearing the children cry, she ran to them. Antek went into the yard to continue his inspection of everything. He was so severely masterful of aspect, that—though he only threw out a word here and there—Pete felt alarmed, and Vitek, afraid to come near him, slunk about at a respectful distance.

Yuzka, was milking her third cow, and bawling ever louder and louder:

"Still, Pretty One, be still,  
And let me fill  
The pail!"

"Why," he called out to her, "you screech as if flayed alive!"

She was dumb for an instant; but, bold and daring by nature, she soon struck up again, though in a less high-pitched key this time:

"My mother begs of thee  
This evening not to fail:  
Still, Pretty One, be still!"

"Can you not be quiet? Master is present!" Hanka said, reprovingly, carrying some water for the cow to drink.

Antek took the vessel from her hands, and set it before the cow, saying with a laugh:

"Screech away, Yuzka, screech away; you'll drive all the rats off the premises in no time!"



"I shall do just as I please!" she answered back sulkily, in a mood to quarrel. But as soon as they had gone by, she ceased her song, though she still eyed her brother askance, with a resentful sniff.

Hanka, busy with the pigs, carried them so many heavy tubs of mash that he was sorry for her.

"That is too hard work for you; let the lads carry them," he said. "And I shall get you a wench besides; Yagustynka is of no more use to you than the whining of a dog!—Where is she now?"

"Gone to her children, to make it up with them!—A wench? Well, one would be handy; but the expense!—I could manage things by myself. But let it be as you will have it." It was surprising (so grateful she felt) that she did not kiss her husband's hand. In great glee, she added: "And then I should be able to breed yet more geese, and fatten yet another swine for sale."

After revolving the matter in his mind, he came to this conclusion:

"Now we have a farm of our own, we must behave as becomes our condition, and as our fathers have always done!"

After supper, he went outside the hut, to receive his friends and acquaintances, who had come to welcome him back with great joy.

"We were looking out for you," Gregory said, "even as the kite looks out for rain."

"Ah, well, they kept me there, they kept me, that pack of wolves! and there was no getting away from them!"

All sat down in the shadow of the hut. There were lights on every side, and bright stars overhead; the mill-pond murmured, moaning now and then; and all around it the people were enjoying the cool of the evening.

Roch interrupted some commonplace talk with: "Know ye that the head official has decided there is to be an assembly here in a fortnight, to vote for a school?"

"Is that our business?" young Ploshka cried. "Let our fathers see to it."

Gregory took him up sharply. "'Tis easy enough to lay

all on our fathers' backs, and lie lazily on our own! The reason things go so ill in the village is that none of us younger men will trouble about them."

"Let them make over their lands to us, and we will!"

This was an opening for a dispute, when Antek suddenly interposed.

"We certainly do need a school here; but we ought not to vote half a kopek for such a one as the head official would give us."

Roch seconded him strongly, urging them all to resist.

"Ye will each vote a *zloty*, and have to pay a rouble. . . . What about the vote for the Law-Court Building, eh? They have fattened finely on your money; their bellies protrude with a vengeance!"

"I am decidedly against the vote," said Gregory, and, taking up some books, he went to study quietly by Roch's side.

There was little further talk after that; even Matthew spoke but few words, only keeping his eye upon Antek; and they were about to go home, when the blacksmith appeared. He had but just come back from the Manor, he said, and fell a-cursing both village and villagers.

"And what ails you now?" asked Hanka, peeping out of the window.

"What, indeed?—I shame to tell it: our peasants here are all louts and boobies! They don't know their own mind.—The Squire behaved to them as to men and landholders; and they, they acted like mere gooseherds. The agreement had been made: naught was required but to sign it. Then one of them scratches me his head and grunts: 'Shall I . . . or shall I not?' Another would fain still consult his good-wife anew; a third sets to whining for a bit of meadow adjacent to his land, that he wants given him.—What can be done with such fellows?—The Squire is raging—will not hear of the agreement any more, nor let any of the cattle from Lipka graze on his lands, and will make anyone smart that sends them there."

This unforeseen calamity dismayed them all, and they



had no words too strong for the guilty. Matthew said with sorrow:

"All this comes from the people's having no leader. We are like stray sheep!"

"Has not Michael pointed this out to them clearly enough?"

"Oh, Michael! He goes where gain is to be had, and holds with the Manor: none therefore will trust him. They listen; but as to following what he says . . . !

Here the smith swore he cared only for the public good, even to giving time and trouble gratis, that the agreement might be made!

"And if ye should swear that in church," Matthew growled, "they still would not believe you."

"Let someone else, then, try," he retorted; "we shall see how he succeeds."

"Yes, someone else ought certainly to try."

"And who? The priest? Or the miller perhaps?" several men asked ironically.

"Who?—Why, Antek Boryna! If he cannot bring folk to their senses, we must give them up as a bad job."

"I?—I?" Antek faltered, in confusion. "Will anyone hearken to me?"

"All will! You are an able man, and the foremost amongst us."

"True it is!—Aye, aye!—You and none other!—We'll follow you!" were the cries that arose—not much to the smith's taste, seemingly. He twisted about, scratched his moustache, and grinned maliciously when Antek said:

"Well, well, they say: 'Pot-making is for others than saints.'—I can but try; and we'll talk the matter over another time."

Several, as they went away, took him aside, urging him to accept, and promising their support. Klemba said:

"We must have someone to lead us, who has wits and a strong hand, and honesty into the bargain."

"And," Matthew added, laughing, "who can command, and use a cudgel if needful."

Antek now remained alone with the smith; Roch had gone aside to pray earnestly in the porch.

They talked matters over very quietly and very long. Hanka meantime went about the hut, shaking up the bedding, providing the pillows with clean slips, and making her ablutions as for some great solemnity; combing her hair by the window, and peeping out at the two men with growing impatience. She listened attentively, too, to the smith, who dissuaded Antek from taking up such a burden, since he never could manage the peasants, and the Squire was against him.

"That's false!" she called out to him through the window. "He offered to stand bail for you in court."

"If ye know so much more about it, then let's drop the matter," he cried, surly as a dog.

Antek rose, yawning drowsily.

"But," his visitor concluded, "I'll just wind up with this: you are only at liberty till your trial; and who knows how things will go with you then? In such a position, how can you meddle with other folk's affairs?"

Antek sat down again, and was lost in a brown study. The smith did not wait for his answer, but went home.

Hanka more than once looked out at Antek, but he did not notice her. She at last called him in a tone of timid pleading:

"Come, Antek, 'tis bedtime; you must be very weary."

"Coming, Hanka, coming!" he said, rising heavily.

She began to say her evening prayers with tremulous lips, while she undressed in haste.

But he went in, sorely troubled, and thinking: "What shall I do if I am sent to Siberia?"



## CHAPTER V

“PETE, bring firewood in!” Hanka called out from the cabin-door. She was covered with flour and very untidy with bread-making.

A big fire roared in the baking-oven. She raked the coals to spread them out, and hastened to roll the dough and shape it into loaves, which she carried out into the passage upon a board that she set in the sunshine, for them to rise more quickly. She bustled about in a great hurry, for the dough was almost overbrimming the big kneading-trough, covered with bedding for warmth.

“Yuzka! more wood on the fire; one end of the oven is almost black!”

But no Yuzka was at hand, and Pete did not hasten to obey. He was loading dung on a cart, heaping and pressing it down, keeping up meanwhile a conversation with the blind *Dziad*, who was occupied in making ropes of straw outside the barn.

The afternoon sun was so hot that the walls exuded liquid resin, and the wind blew like the blast from an oven, making every movement wearisome. The flies, too, hummed in myriads over the cart, and the horses, assailed, and maddened by them, came near breaking their halters, and perhaps their legs, in pulling and straining to avoid their bites.

The yard was so flooded with the heat, together with the pungent effluvium of the dung, that even the birds in the orchard close by could sing no longer; the hens had lain down half dead under the hedge, and the pigs wallowed squealing in the mud by the well. All at once the *Dziad* fell a-sneezing furiously: a whiff yet more noisomely offensive had reached him from the cow-byre.

“God bless you, *Dziad*!”

"That's no incense-smoke, I wot; and used though I am to the smell, it is stronger than snuff in my nostrils."

"But use makes all things pleasant."

"Fool! don't you think I ever smell aught but dung?"

"I was but repeating what my old grandsire told me when my drill-sergeant gave me slaps in the face."

"Ha, ha, ha!—Did you get used to that, pray?"

"I soon had enough of such drilling, and meeting the rufian one day in a quiet corner alone, I made his face swell like a pumpkin . . . and he never slapped mine any more!"

"Did you serve long?"

"The whole of my five years! I could not purchase my discharge; so I had to—shoulder arms.—At first, ere I knew a thing or two, anyone who would could ill-treat me, and I had to suffer want . . . till my comrades taught me to snap up anything I needed . . . or get some maidservant to give it me, whom I promised to marry. And what nicknames those Russian soldiers gave me! and how they laughed at my speech and at my manner of prayer!"

"Did they dare laugh at that, the plague-spotted heathen?"

"Aye, till I punched their ribs for them, one after another, and made them leave off!"

"You must be a strong fighter!"

"Not especially," he answered with a boastful smile; "but I could drub any three of them at a time!"

"Have you seen warfare?"

"Of course. Against the Turks. We thrashed them soundly, we did!"

"Pete!" Hanka called out to him; "where's the wood?"

"Where it was," he muttered inaudibly.

"Your mistress is calling you," the *Dziad* said.

"Let her call! What, am I to wash up the pots for her?"

"Are you deaf?" she shouted, running out of the house towards him.

"I shall not feed the fire; 'tis no duty of mine!" he shouted back.



She began thereupon to rail at him to the best of her ability.

He, on his side, railed back at her, nothing loath, and when she presently gave him a harder home-thrust, he planted his pitchfork in the dunk and cried angrily:

"Ye have not to do with Yagna now: your screaming will not scare me away."

"But what I will do, you shall see . . . and remember!"

She went on scolding the insolent fellow, while she carried the loaves of dough into the porch, or flung the logs into the oven, or looked after the children. But the labour and the intense heat were wearing her out terribly; for it was stiflingly hot within and in the passage on account of the fire in the oven. The flies, too, that swarmed on every wall, were so insupportable that she almost wept with rage as she beat them off with a branch, all streaming with perspiration, exasperated, and ever more impatient and slower at her work.

She was just patting the last loaf into shape for the oven, when Pete prepared to drive out of the yard.

"Wait a moment and take your afternoon meal!"

"Whoa!—Yes, I may as well: my stomach is empty enough after dinner."

"Had you too little to eat?"

"The food is so wretched, it goes through the bowels as through a sieve."

"There's insolence for you! What, you must have meat? And am I munching sausages in corners, say? No other farmers can at this season give their men what you get. Look at the *Komorniki*, how they feed!"

She set down in the porch a pot of sour milk and a loaf, and he began to cram himself gluttonously, now and again flinging a morsel of bread to the stork, that had hurried in from the orchard, and stood now, like a dog, watching him eat.

"Poor stuff.—As thin as buttermilk," he grumbled, when pretty well filled.

"Naught less than cream would do for you, belike? Wait till you get some!"

When he could eat no more and had taken the reins to start, she said to him sarcastically: "Take service with Yagna; she will fatten you!"

"Surely. When she ruled here, no one starved in the hut!" And he gave the horse a stroke with the whip, and the cart a push with his shoulder, to set it in motion.

He had wounded her to the quick, but was off before she could find words to answer him.

The swallows were twittering under the thatch, and a flock of pigeons alighted cooing in the porch. She drove them away; and then, hearing a grunt, rushed out, fearing her pigs were at the onion-bed. Fortunately, it was but the neighbour's sow, rooting beneath the fence.

"Just put your snout inside our enclosure, and I shall dispose of you in a fine way!"

But no sooner was she returning to work than the stork hopped on to the porch, lurked about there for a moment, cocked first his right eye at the loaves, then his left . . . and set to dig into the dough, swallowing it by large morsels!

Uttering a loud cry, she rushed at him.

He fled away with wide-open beak, making frantic efforts to get the dough down; but when she caught up with him to give him a beating, he flew up and alighted on the top of the barn, where he remained for a long time, rapping out his *klek-klek* and wiping the dough from his beak on the thatch.

"O you thief! let me but catch you, and I'll shatter you to bits!" she threatened, filling up the hollows the stork's beak had made.

Yuzka came in then, and all Hanka's anger was poured forth on her.

"Where have you been, you gadabout?—Always running hither and thither, like a cat with a bladder tied to its tail!—I'll tell Antek what a worker you are!—But get the embers out now, and quickly!"

"I was only at the Ploshkas' with their Kate. All are



afield, and the poor girl has no one to fetch her water even!"

"What ails her, then?"

"The small-pox, I think; she is flushed and burning hot."

"And if you have caught it from her, I will take you off to the hospital."

"Is it likely? I have sat by a sick-bed already, nor ever got any hurt. Have ye no mind how I tended you, when you were lying in?" And so she went on after her fashion, prattling away in her absurdly thoughtless fashion, driving the flies off meantime and preparing to take the embers out of the oven.

Hanka interrupted her as she worked: "Ah! you must take the food to the people in the field."

"Instantly, instantly!—Shall I fry some eggs for Antek?"

"Do; but take heed not to put in too much fat!"

"Oh, do ye grudge it him?"

"How could I? But it might not agree with him."

Yuzka loved a run; so she did her work quick, and was off, before Hanka had closed the oven, with three vessels of sour milk, and bread done up in her apron.

Hanka cried to her from the window: "See whether the linen spread to bleach is dry, and wet it on your return: it is sure to be dry before sunset."

But the little chit was over the stile by then; the song she was singing floated back, and her hemp-coloured hair was seen bobbing along through the rye.

On the arable land, by the forest, the *Komorniki* were scattering the dung brought previously by Pete, while Antek was ploughing it in. The stiff clay soil, though it had been harrowed not long ago, was hard as stone and baked in the sun; the horses had to pull with such mighty efforts as to strain their harness to breaking-point.

Antek, seemingly glued to his plough-handles, drove his way on with dogged pertinacity, his mind concentrated on his work: now and then clacking the whip on the horses' hind quarters, but mostly encouraging them with a smack of his lips; for the work was really very wearisome. With

a firm steady hand he directed the plough, cutting furrow after furrow, in long straight strips, such as it is the custom to make for wheat-land.

Crows hopped along by the furrows, picking up earth-worms; and the bay colt, that had been out to graze on the field pathway, again and again pressed to its mother's side, eager to suck her milk.

"Milk at its age! What can have come over the greedy thing!" Antek growled, striking at its legs with his whip. It ran off, tail in the air, while he went on ploughing patiently, only at times breaking the silence with a word or two to the women. He was cross and tired out, and, when Pete arrived, gave vent to his feelings.

"These women," he cried, "have been fain to stop working because of you; and you come on now slow as a rag-picker!—Wherefore have ye stopped so long at the edge of the forest? I saw you!"

"The 'wherefore' is there still; ye can see it; it will wait."

"A curse on your saucy tongue!—Vee-o, old fellow, Vee-o!"

But now the horses went slower, foam-flecked and worn out. He himself, stripped to his shirt and drawers, was perspiring profusely, and his hands too were feeling the stress of the work. So that, on perceiving Yuzka, he cried out very heartily:

"Good now, 'twas high time ye came; we are all famishing!"

He finished the furrow up to the pine-wood, took the horses from the plough and turned them loose to graze on the verdant road by the forest: then, flinging himself down at the border of the wood, ate like a ravenous wolf, Yuzka all the time chattering away until he had enough of it.

"Let me be.—I care naught for your tittle-tattle," he said peevishly, and she, answering as peevishly back, ran off to pluck berries in the wood.

The pine-forest was quiet, dried up, aromatically scented, and, as it were, dying in the sun's fierce outpour. Only a very little verdure was to be seen, and out of its depths



there blew a breeze laden with resinous fragrance, and carrying on its wings the warbling of birds.

Antek, stretched out on the grass, lit a cigarette and, looking into the distance, saw, as through a thickening fog, the Squire on horseback, leaping across the Podlesie fields; and some men with him, bearing poles for land-measuring.

Huge pines, with trunks as of red copper, rose above him, flinging down wavy and slumberous shadows. He would presently have fallen fast asleep, had it not been for the quick clatter of a wagon—the organist's servant, carting trunks to the sawmill—and then the sound of the familiar greeting: "Praised be Jesus Christ!"

One by one, the *Komorniki* were coming home from the forest, each with a load of firewood on her shoulders. At the very end of the file, Yagustynka dragged herself along, bowed almost to the ground beneath her burden.

"Rest ye here.—Why, your eyes are almost starting from their sockets."

She seated herself opposite him, leaning her load against a tree, and scarce able to breathe.

"Such labour is not for you," he told her with compassion.

"Yes: I feel quite crushed now," she replied.

"Lay those heaps closer, closer!" he cried to his farm-servant Pete, and went on: "Why does not someone take your place?"

She answered only with a surly look, and turned away her red eyes full of anguish.

"Ye are now so changed!—Ye give way so. . . . Quite another woman."

"'Even a flint will break under the hammer,'" she moaned, hanging her head. "And: 'Suffering consumes man faster than rust eats iron.'"

"The present season is hard even for well-to-do farmers."

"Hard! Let none talk of times being hard, so long as he has wild marjoram to eat, cooked with bran."

"Good heavens! come round this evening: we shall find two or three bushels of potatoes for you still. When harvest comes, ye can work the price out."

She broke down in a fit of crying, and could hardly speak to thank him.

"Perchance, too," he added kindly, "Hanka may have something else for you besides."

"Had it not been for her, we should have died of starvation!" she declared, sobbing. "Yes, I'll work for you whenever you may want me. May God reward you! I am not speaking for myself; I am accustomed to hunger. But my dear little mites are crying out: 'Grandam, give us to eat!'—and there is naught for them! I tell you: to feed them, I would cut off my own arms, or steal things from the altar, and sell them to the Jew."

"Then do ye live once more with your children?"

"Am I not their mother? Can I leave them in such misery? Every misfortune seems to have fallen on them this year. Their cow has died; all their potatoes have rotted (they even had to buy seed-potatoes); the gale blew their barn down; and, to crown all, my daughter-in-law has been ailing ever since her last child was born. They are all left to God's mercy."

"Aye, but why? Because your Voytek always reeks of brandy and only cares for the tavern."

"If at times he has taken too much, 'twas misery drove him that way," she said, eager in defence of her son. "Never, while he had work to do, did he even look in at the Jew's. But to a poor man, every glass is reckoned as a crime.—Alas! the Lord has dealt with them bitterly, very bitterly.—Is it right He should thus dog the steps of a poor foolish lout? And for what? What harm has he done?" she muttered, raising to Heaven her eyes, full of indignant challenge.

"But what! have ye not laid your curse on them?" Antek said, with strong significance. "Often and often ye have!"

"Ah, was it possible that our Lord should ever have listened to my senseless outcries?" But she added, in a tone of secret uneasiness: "Even when a mother curses her children, her heart never really wishes them evil.—'Wrath and woe make tongues go!' Aye, indeed. . . ."



"Has your Voytek farmed out his meadow yet?"

"The miller offered a thousand *zloty* for it, but I would not allow it. What that wolf has once got in his grip, not the devil himself could wrest out of it!—And perhaps someone else might be found with the cash?"

"It is surely a lovely meadow—can be mown twice a year. Had I only ready money just now!" He sighed, licking his lips with strong desire.

"Matthias would have been glad to get it: it lies so close to Yagna's land."

The name uttered gave him a start. He paused, however, and then inquired, with an indifferent look, his eyes wandering over the country-side:

"How are they getting on at Dominikova's?"

But she guessed what was in his mind, and smiled with thin lips, drawing closer:

"The place is a hell for them all! All there have funeral faces: they are chilled to the marrow with the gloom which fills it. They cry their eyes out, and live on, waiting upon God's Providence. Yagna especially——"

And she set to weave him a story about Yagna's sufferings and miseries and lonely life—adding all kinds of flattering things besides, to draw him out. But he remained mute, though such a raging desire for Yagna had sprung up within him that he was quivering all over.

Luckily Yuzka, coming back from the forest, made a diversion. She poured out into his hat the berries she had plucked, took up the empty vessels, and scampered away home. And Yagustynka, without waiting for any confidences, rose to go away, moaning with pain.

"Pete!" he ordered curtly. "Take her back with you in the cart!"

Once more he grasped the plough-handles and set patiently to cleave the baked and stubborn clay, bending forward like an ox under the yoke, and putting his whole soul into the work, but unable to stifle the desire that surged up.

The day seemed very long to him. Many a time he looked to see the sun's height, and measure the length of

the fields, of which much still remained to be ploughed. His trouble of mind increased, and he beat the horses, and cried furiously to the women to work faster. His agitation, too, was getting beyond bearing; and his brain swarmed so now with countless thoughts that his hands could no longer drive the plough steadily, and it would deflect against the stones. Hard by the forest, it went so deep under a root that the coulter was wrenched off.

To do any more work was out of the question. He took the plough away on a light sledge, to which he put one of the horses, and made for home.

The cabin was empty, and everything there untidy and soiled with flour: Hanka, in the orchard, quarrelled with a neighbour.

"The woman! She has always time enough for brawling!" he growled, on entering the farm-yard. There he grew still more angry: the other plough, which he took out of the shed, was quite out of gear. He worked at it a long time, losing his patience as he heard the quarrel going on, and Hanka raising her voice to a scream.

"If ye pay for the damage done, I'll give you back your sow: if not, I'll bring an action! Pay for the linen she tore in spring on the bleaching-ground; pay for my potatoes she has eaten now! I have witnesses to prove what has been done.—Oh, a clever woman this is!—Thinks to fatten her sow at my expense, does she? But I will not give up my rights!"

So she went on, and the neighbour giving her as violent language in return, the quarrel was waxing venomous, both of them stretching out their fists over the hedge.

"Hanka!" shouted Antek, heaving the plough on to his shoulders.

She at once ran to him, out of breath, and ruffled like an angry hen.

"Why, what a din you do make! All the village can hear you."

"I'm standing up for my rights!" she cried out. "What,



shall I suffer another man's swine to root in my garden? So much harm done—and am I to say no word?" But he stopped her short, with a sharp sentence.

"Dress yourself, and try to look like a creature of God."

"What now? Must I dress up for work as for church?"

He eyed her with disdain, for she looked as though someone had swept the cabin floor with her. Then he walked away.

The smith was busy at work; his hammers were heard from a distance, loudly and tunefully clinking; and the forge, hot as hell, was uproarious with the tempestuous streams from the bellows that puffed in cadence.

Michael himself was working with his assistant, forging long bars of iron; and his face looked like a blackamoor's, and he beat on the anvil, as it were, out of sheer spite against it, smiting unweariedly.

"And for whom are those thick axle-trees?"

"For Ploshka's wagon. He is to cart timber for the saw-mill."

Antek rolled a cigarette and sat down by the door-step. The hammers went on with pertinacious fury, smiting rhythmically again and again on the red-hot iron, slowly changing its shape beneath their strokes, as they bent it to the will of those who wielded them; and the smithy vibrated.

"Would ye not like to cart timber as well?" asked Michael, thrusting the bar deep into the flame, and working the bellows.

"I suppose the miller would not be willing. I hear he is the organist's partner, and hand in hand with the Jews."

"But you have horses," he said with bland friendliness; "horses and all that is needful. And your Pete does naught but lounge about your farm-yard.—And they pay pretty well."

"No doubt a little money before the harvest would be a good thing; but then, am I to go and beg the miller to do me a service?"

"No: arrange matters direct with the dealers."

"Whom I do not know!—If you would speak for me . . ."

"Since you ask me, I am willing—and shall go to them this very day."

Antek went out hurriedly; for now the hammers were playing, and a deluge of sparks of fire flew on every side.

"I shall be back this instant, and am only going to look what kind of timber they are bringing in."

At the sawmill, likewise, the workers were lively; the logs were being hewn into shape one after another; the saws rasped harshly through the great trunks, while the water, pouring out of the wheels into the river, boiled and bubbled and foamed, swirling along the narrow mill-tail banks. Rough pine-logs, with their boughs scarcely lopped off, thundered down out of the carts, till the earth shook; while half a dozen workmen were busy with their axes, squaring them for the mill; and others were carrying the sawn boards out into the sunshine. Matthew was foreman there, and Antek could see him busily engaged, both working himself and directing the work of the others.

They met with hearty good-fellowship.

"Why, what's become of Bartek?" Antek asked, looking round him.

"He had enough of Lipka, and is gone from us."

"Some folk must needs be always on the move!—Ye seem to have work for a long time in advance, with so much timber here!"

"For a year, perchance, or yet longer. If the Squire come to terms with all of us, he is going to cut down and sell the half of his woods."

"Ah! I saw them measuring the land out again on the Podlesie farm."

"Yes: someone comes to terms every day.—The silly sheep! They would not make an agreement one and all together, because they hoped the Squire would offer more. And now they make it apart and in secret from the others, each one striving to be first!"

"Some men are like donkeys, which, if you would have them go forward, you have to pull their tails. Yes, indeed,



they are silly sheep.—And of course the Squire makes a good profit out of this state of things.”

“Have ye taken possession of your property as yet?”

“No, it is too soon after Father’s death, and we may not divide the land; but I have already overhauled the whole property carefully.”

A face just then appeared amongst the alders on the farther bank of the river. Antek fancied it might be Yagna. The thought made him restless, and though the talk continued, his eyes wandered a good deal towards the bank of the stream.

“Now,” he said presently, “I must go and bathe: the heat is unbearable”; and with that he went away down-stream, making as if in search of a convenient place. But as soon as he was out of sight, he mended his pace to a run.

Yes, it was she herself, with a hoe on her shoulder, going out to work on her cabbage-plot.

He soon reached and greeted her.

She looked round cautiously and, recognizing him as he bent forward amongst the parted sedges, stopped short, alarmed, bewildered, and uncertain what to do.

“What! don’t you know me?” he whispered eagerly, trying at the same time, though unsuccessfully, to pass the river.

“Was it possible not to know you?” she answered low, looking apprehensively behind her towards the cabbage-plot, on which several women made red splashes afar.

“Where are you in hiding? I cannot find you anywhere.”

“Where? Your woman drove me from the cabin: I am staying with Mother.”

“Concerning that matter, I desire speech with you. Come, Yagna, and meet me by the churchyard this evening. I have something to say to you. Do come!” And he begged her very earnestly.

“Yes?—And what if someone should see me with you once more?—Of what has been I have enough already!” she answered. But he begged and entreated so hard that she felt her heart melting, and was sorry for the man.

"What new thing can you say? and wherefore do you call me?"

"Am I, Yagna, so altogether a stranger to you now?"

"No stranger; but yet not mine! I think no more of such things."

"But come only, and you'll not rue it!—Do you fear the burying-ground? Then come to the priest's orchard. . . . Have you forgotten where, Yagna? Have you forgotten?"

Yagna averted her head, for her face was suffused with crimson.

"Talk not foolishly; you shame me!" She was exceedingly confused.

"Come—come—come! I shall be waiting till midnight!"

"Wait, then!" And she turned away and fled to the cabbage-field.

He gazed after her greedily, full of such craving, and burning with such fire in every vein, that he longed to pursue and seize her in the presence of all—and could barely hold back from doing so.

"'Tis naught—only the great heat has inflamed me mightily," he thought, and undressed quickly to take a bath.

The cool water calmed him down; its chill brought him to his senses, and he began to reflect.

"How miserably weak I am, for a trifle to upset me so!"

He felt humiliated and looked round, fearing lest someone might have seen him with her; and then he carefully passed in review all he had heard said against Yagna.

"A pretty creature you are, indeed!" he thought, in contempt not unmingled with sorrow. But suddenly, as he stopped beneath a tree, a vision of her came before his eyes, in all her dazzling and marvellous beauty. And he cried:

"There's not another like her in the whole wide world!"

This he said to himself with a groan, yearning terribly to see her but once again, to gather her in his arms, to press her to his breast, and take his full of those red lips of hers, and suck her sweet honey to the very last drop!



"Only, O Yagna! for this one last time! this once, this once only!" he cried aloud to her as if she had been present. For some time afterwards he rubbed his eyes, and gazed upon the trees around him, before he could muster sufficient strength to go back to the forge. Michael was alone, working at Antek's plough.

"Will your cart," he asked him, "be able to bear such a great weight of timber?"

"Let there be but the timber for it to bear!"

"I have promised: 'tis just as if you had it on your cart already."

Antek set to ciphering on the door with a bit of chalk.

"I find," he said with much pleasure, "that I may earn about three hundred *zloty* ere harvest-time."

"It will," the smith remarked casually, "come in handy for that affair of yours."

Antek's face clouded over at once, and his eyes looked gloomy.

"Say that nightmare of mine! When I but think of it, I feel all broken, and care no more even for my life."

"That I can well understand; but not your having failed as yet to seek some means to preserve yourself."

"But what can I do?"

"Something must be done. What, man! the calf gives its throat to the butcher: will you do so too?"

"None can butt through a stone wall with his head," Antek returned, sighing bitterly.

Michael went on working with great energy; Antek sat plunged in disquieting and fearful thoughts, which made his face dark with changing expressions, till he started up and looked out in dismay. His brother-in-law let him suffer so for a considerable time, watching him with eyes full of cunning; but he finally said in a low voice:

"Casimir of Modlitsa found a way."

"He that fled to 'Hamerica'?"

"The same. A clever dog!—Aye, and a resolute one: who knew what he had to do, and did it!"

"Did they ever prove that he slew the gendarme?"

"He did not wait so long. No fool he, to submit to rot in prison!"

"He could flee: he was single."

"A man saves himself as he can. See, I do not advise you in any wise: I only say what others have done. But Voytek Gayda of Volitsa came back from penal servitude only last Eastertide.—Ten years. Well, 'tis not a whole lifetime, and one can survive it."

"Ten years! O Lord God!" Antek murmured, clutching at his hair.

"Yes; it was hard labour for that space of time."

"I could bear anything but that! God! I was there but for a few months, and came near losing my wits."

"Whereas ye could be beyond the seas in three weeks: ask Yankel."

"But it is so horribly far! How can I go—throw up everything—leave home, children, land, my village, and flee so awfully far—and for ever?"

He was absolutely panic-stricken.

"But yet so many have gone there of their own accord; and none of these ever dreamed of returning to this Paradise of ours."

"And I cannot bear even to think of it!"

"True. But take a look at Voytek, and hear what he tells about his penal servitude: ye will find it still more unbearable to think of. Why, the man is not forty yet, but quite hoary, and bent, and tottering: he spits blood, and can hardly move, and all can see he is bound for the 'priest's byre' soon.—But I need say no more: ye have your reason, and must decide."

And for the time he was silent; having sown trouble in the man's mind, he could safely leave it to grow up in time, and bring forth the harvest he expected. So, having repaired the plough, he said lightly:

"And now I am off to the dealers. Have your cart ready to carry the timber.—As for that other business, do not trouble. What is to be—is to be; and God is merciful.—I shall see you to-morrow evening."



Antek, however, could not forget his words. He had swallowed the bait of friendship, and it stuck in his throat, just as a hook sticks in the poor fish that has taken it and chokes. What pangs he felt—what sufferings he had to bear!

"Ten years! Ten years! Oh, how can I ever bear ten years!" The very thought palsied and benumbed him.

Arriving at his home, he trundled the cart into the barn, to have it in readiness for the next morning; but feeling a deep sense of weariness come over him—of the utter inutility of all his efforts—he only called to Pete, who was watering the horses at the well.

"Grease the cart's axle-trees, and have it in readiness for to-morrow. To-morrow you'll have to bring timber from the forest to the sawmill here."

Pete, who cared but little for such hard work, swore violently when he heard the order.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, and do as I tell you. —Hanka, give the horses three measures of oats for provender to-morrow, and you, Pete, get them fresh clover from the meadow: they must have plenty to eat."

To Hanka's questionings he gave only a mumbled answer, and presently went round to Matthew, with whom he was now on a very friendly footing.

The latter, who had but just come home from his work, was supping a dish of sour milk outside his cabin, to cool him after the heat of the day.

Antek could hear, somewhere near, a sort of trickling sound—a querulous heart-broken wailing.

"Who is making that noise?"

"Who but my sister Nastka? I have enough of her love affair!—Her banns are all published now, her wedding is to take place next Sunday—and lo! Dominikova has sent word to us through the Soltys that the holding had been left to her alone; that she will not let Simon have a single strip of land, nor even enter her cabin! And the old woman will keep to what she says: I know her well, that creature!"

"And Simon? What has he to say to that?"

"What should he say? Ever since the morning, he has been sitting in the orchard as dumb as a post, and says not one word even to Nastka. I am afraid his mind must have given way!"

"Simon!" he cried out into the orchard. "Come this way. Boryna is here to see us; perchance he can give some good advice."

After a minute, he came and sat down, without any word of greeting to either of them. He looked very much broken down, and as thin as a plank of aspen wood. Only his eyes burned; and on his thin face there was a look of desperate resolve, from which nothing on earth could turn him away.

"Well," Matthew asked him in a kindly tone, "what have you made up your mind to do?"

"To take an ax and kill her like a dog!"

"Fool! keep such wild talk for the tavern!"

"As there's a God in heaven, I will kill her. What—what else remains for me to do? She drives me off my father's land, turns me out of my hut, gives me no money whatever—what am I to do? I am an orphan, cast destitute on the world; and whither shall I go—whither? My own mother has wronged me so awfully!" he groaned, brushing away a tear with his sleeve. Then, suddenly starting up: "No!" he cried out; "in the name of all mothers of dogs, I will not forgive this, I will not—not if I should rot in jail for it!"

They quieted him. He sat still, but sombre, and in such a state of dumb fury that he would not so much as answer Nastka's sobbing whispers. The others conferred together, thinking how they could be of use to him; but they found no means, because Dominikova, with her hopeless obstinacy, blocked the way. But at last Nastka took her brother aside, and pointed out a plan to him.

"She has hit on an excellent thing!" he exclaimed in great joy, on returning. "She says: Let him purchase six acres of the Podlesie farm from the Squire, to be paid by instalments.—Is't not a good thought?"

"As good as any, indeed.—But . . . whence shall the money come?"



"In any case, for the outset, and as an earnest, Nastka has her thousand *zloty* of ready money."

"True; but whence will the live stock come, and the cabin, the implements and the seed to sow?"

"Whence?—From these!" Simon cried suddenly, springing up and waving both his arms.

"'Tis good talk, that; but can you accomplish it?" Antek asked, in doubt.

"Let me but have it—the land to work on . . . and ye shall see!" he exclaimed with great energy.

"Then we have but to talk with the Squire and buy the land."

"Wait a little, Antek, wait a little; let us consider this in all its bearings."

"Ye will see how well I shall do everything!" said Simon, speaking hurriedly. "Who was it ploughed Mother's ground? Who reaped for her?—I alone! And was it work badly done? Am I a sluggard, tell me? Let the whole village answer—nay, let even Mother bear witness! . . . Oh, if I only have the land! . . . Help me to get that, O ye my dearest of brethren, and I shall thank you to the day of my death!" he cried, weeping and laughing by turns—intoxicated, as it were, with the joy of the hope which had come to him.

As soon as he was a little calmed, they set to deliberate and to talk over the idea and see what was to be done.

"Provided," Nastka said, with a sigh of fear, "provided the Squire be willing to accept instalments."

"I think he will, if Matthew and I guarantee their being paid."

Nastka, for his kindness, was ready to kiss his hands.

"I myself have had sufferings, and know how they taste to other folk," he said, rising to take leave; for it was dark upon the earth: only the sky was yet alight, and the evening glowed in the West.

Antek hesitated awhile in which direction to turn his steps, but at last bent them towards home.

He walked on very leisurely, and at length was close to

his cabin. The windows were open and alight, the children wailing within, Hanka raising her voice and Yuzka retorting shrilly. He could not quite make up his mind, till Lapa came joyfully whining and leaping up. Then—following a sudden impulse of ill humour—he gave the dog a kick and walked back to the village, going down the lane that led to the priest's orchard. He passed along the organist's premises so silently that not even a dog gave tongue; and gliding on outside the priest's garden, he was presently on the wide field-pathway which divided Klemba's land from that of his Reverence.

He was completely hidden in the dark shadow of the trees.

The moon, a sharp thin sickle, already glittered in the shadowy sky. Stars peeped out in ever greater and greater numbers; and the evening, though hot, was shedding dew upon the earth. Quails flew out of the rye; droning beetles whizzed over the fields, and the scent and silence of the meadows made the brain whirl in a sort of stupor.

Yagna was not in sight.

Instead, about half a furlong away, the parish priest, clad in a white dust-coat, walked about saying his prayers, and apparently so intent upon them that he took scant notice how his horses, from grazing on his own miserable fallow land, had crossed to Klemba's rich clover meadow, that rose high and dark, with lush growth and countless flowers, on the other side of the path.

The priest walked on, now whispering his prayers, now looking up to the stars, now stopping to listen intently. And whenever he heard any the faintest murmur in the direction of the village, he would turn round quickly, in seeming anger against his horses.

"You Grey One, whither have you wandered? Into Klemba's good clover, hey? Fond of other folk's property, are you not? What, shall I baste your flanks soundly, will you have me do it, hey!" And his voice sounded very stern.

But the priest's horses were eating with so good an appe-



tite that he could not find it in his heart to stop them, in spite of the harm they were doing: so, looking round him, he reasoned thus with himself:

"Let them take a little, each one of them, poor creatures! I shall put up some prayers for old Dame Klembova's everlasting rest—or make the loss up in some other way!—Oh, the greedy beasts! how fond they are of that clover!"

And once more he paced back and forth, and said his prayers and kept watch, never dreaming that Antek was watching him, and listening, and ever awaiting Yagna more eagerly.

Some time passed thus. At last it occurred to Antek to go and confide his troubles to the priest.

"So learned a man must surely know some way out of them!" he thought, slipping away in the shadow of the barn, to appear thence boldly round the corner, and step out into the field-way, clearing his throat noisily.

The priest, hearing someone come near, called out to his horses:

"You mischievous creatures! You foul beasts! Cannot I take my eye off you for one instant, but ye must be at once on my neighbour's land? O ye swine!—Off with you, Chestnut!" And plucking up his long skirts, he drove them away very speedily.

"Oh! Boryna!" he cried, when the man was near enough. "Well, how goes the world with you?"

"I came to speak with your Reverence, and had been at your house already."

"Yes, I had strolled out to say my prayers and look after the horses: Valek has gone to the Manor house. But those misbegotten beasts of mine—Heaven save the mark!—I can do nothing with them.—Look how magnificently Klemba's field of clover has grown. . . . Like a forest! And from the very same seed as my own. . . . And mine has been so frost-bitten that there's naught in my fields but camomile weeds and thistles." He sighed heavily, seating himself on a stone.

"Sit down; we'll talk together. What splendid weather

we have!—In three weeks we shall hear the sickles clinking. I tell you we shall."

Antek sat down and tried to unburden his mind, while the priest listened attentively, now shouting at the horses, now taking pinch after pinch of snuff, and sneezing with great violence.

"Whither! Whither!—'Tis not our land!—Behold what perverse swine they are!"

But Antek did not make any headway; he stammered and wandered a good deal in his explanations.

"I see you're in evil case.—Now tell me—tell me all frankly: it will ease your heart! To whom can one speak openly, if not to a priest?"

He stroked his head, and offered him snuff; and Antek, encouraged, at last made a clean breast of it.

The priest heard him out, and then said with a deep sigh:

"For the slaying of the forester, I should have given you only a canonical penance. You were fighting to save your father; and, moreover, the man—a libertine and an unbeliever—is no very great loss. But the courts will not let you off so. Ye will get at least four years of hard labour! As to escaping . . . True, men can live in America. And they get out of jail likewise.—But, between the two evils, the choice is a hard one!"

And now he was for Antek's escaping instantly; now he advised him to stay and work his time out; and said in conclusion: "One thing is undoubtedly to be done: have trust in God's Providence and wait upon His mercy."

"But they will put me in irons and drive me to Siberia!"

"Well, men come back thence: I myself have seen some."

"Aye, but in what state shall I find my farm—after so many a year? How will my wife be able to keep things going?—All will go to rack and ruin!"

"With all my heart I wish I could do something for you; but what can be done?—Wait a little: I shall say Mass for you at the altar of the Transfiguration here!—Pray drive



me these horses into the stable; it is high time—yes, yes, it is high time to go to bed.”

Antek was so greatly upset that he had forgotten all about Yagna, whom he did not remember till he left the priest's yard, and hastened to find her.

She was awaiting him, crouched in the shadow of the granary.

“Oh, the time has been long—how long!”

Her voice was changed and hoarse . . . perhaps with the falling dew.

“How could I slip away from his Reverence?” he asked, with an attempt to embrace her; but she thrust him away.

“I am in no mood now for that sort of thing!”

“You are so changed, I know you no longer!” Her behaviour hurt him.

“As ye left me, so I am!”

“Were you another, you could not be more different!” He pressed closer to her.

“Can you marvel, after such long neglect?”

“Never did I neglect you; but could I fly to you out of prison?”

“I was alone—alone with my remorse and with a living corpse!” And she shuddered with cold.

“And did you never think to come and visit me? Oh, no, your head was full of other thoughts!”

“O Antek, Antek!” she exclaimed incredulously; “did you ever expect my coming?”

“Can I say how much?—Like an idiot, I was hanging at the bars every day, looking out for you.” He stopped, shaken with sudden anguish.

“My God!—And your curses on me—there, beyond the haystack? And your rancour of old days? And when they took you away, did you speak to me—look at me even? Ye had a kind word for all, even for the dog—I marked it well—but none for me!”

“Yagna, I bore you no grudge whatsoever. But a man whose soul is tortured forgets both himself and the whole

world." They were speechless awhile, standing shoulder to shoulder, hip to hip, the moon shining straight into their faces. Both breathed heavily; both were torn with memories that seared them, and their eyes brimmed with unshed tears of agony.

"Not so did ye receive me, once upon a time," he said gloomily.

All at once she fell a-weeping with abundant tears, like a little child.

"And how shall I receive you, pray? Have you blasted my life and wronged me too little as yet, now that all men look upon me as on a dog?"

"I blasted your life?—Was't through me?" He was hot with anger.

"Yea, through you! On your account did that harridan—that offal—drive me from your door! And on your account have I become the laughing-stock of all Lipka!"

"Oh, and do ye no longer meet the Voyt? and the others besides? Ha?" he broke out grimly.

"All that—all!—came about because of you!" she hissed, pierced by his words to her inmost heart. "Wherefore did you force your will on me as on a dog? Had you no wife of your own? I was senseless; you had so befooled me that I saw no one in the world but you. And why did you leave me then, a prey to all men?"

But he, in a frenzy of bitterness, muttered between his set teeth:

"Did I constrain you, forsooth, to become my step-mother? And did I force you to be afterwards the prize of any that cared?"

"Ah! why did you not lift a finger to prevent me? Had you loved me, you would never have left me to myself, but saved me . . . as others would have done!" Her regret was so clear, so sincere and unfathomably deep, that he found no word to defend himself. All his former acrimony vanished from his soul, and he again felt love stirring there.

"Hush, my Yagna, hush, my little one!" he whispered tenderly.



"And this wrong besides have I suffered, that you—you, of all men!—should rise up against me with the others!" she sobbed, her head against the barn.

He led her away to the field-path, gathered her to his bosom, fondled her, caressed her silky locks, and wiped her wet cheeks, and kissed her trembling lips, and her eyes, welling with briny tears—those dear sorrowful eyes of hers! He showered every endearment on her, and presently her weeping grew fainter; she leaned her drooping head upon his breast, and put her arm round his neck with child-like trust.

But Antek's blood was by now all on fire; his kisses grew fierce and stormy, his embraces tightened to a crushing hug.

She at first did not realize what was coming on, nor what was passing in herself. It was only when she felt completely helpless, and knew again the power of his hot kisses, that she attempted to break loose, begging him in terror, almost with tears:

"Let me go! Antek, for God's sake, let me go!—I shall cry out!"

But escape was impossible: his wild impetuosity crushed all resistance down, and prevailed utterly.

"For the last—the very last, last time!" he ejaculated, in a hoarse breathless voice.

And the world turned round them both, and they both went down headlong into the boiling whirlpool. Both loved passionately, as they once had loved before—fainting, swooning, near to death.

As once—as of old—as in the past!

They forgot all—all save the tempest of fire that was carrying them away—all save their own insatiable desire. As the thunderbolt unites with the tree which quenches its fire and is itself consumed, so they each destroyed the other's passion in the tempest of their own. And for that one short minute of a rapture soon to expire for ever, after this last exuberant outburst, their former love had revived.

A moment afterwards, they were again seated side by side, feeling their souls very dark within them. Each glanced

at the other by stealth, and as if in terror: each shunned meeting the other's eyes that spoke of shame and regret.

Once more, with lips eager for kisses, he sought her lips, but without success: she turned away from him with aversion.

In vain he whispered in her ear the sweet names of endearment he had once given her. She looked up at the moon, and replied not a word. In him, this bearing of hers aroused resentment, cooled passion down, and brought petulance and ill humour in its stead.

They sat together, unable to speak, each impatient of the other's presence, each waiting for the other to rise and go.

Yagna's flame was out to the last spark; nothing was there but ashes now; and she spoke first, with barely concealed animosity.

"In truth, ye did take me like a robber—by sheer might and main."

"Well, Yagna, and are you not mine—mine?" He would have embraced her again, but she pushed him violently from her.

"Neither yours nor anyone's!—Understand that!—No, nor anyone's!"

She fell a-crying once more, but this time he neither fondled nor soothed her. After some time, however, he asked her very seriously:

"Yagna, will you flee with me?"

"And whither?" she returned, her wet eyes looking him full in the face.

"Why not to 'Hamerica'? Would you go, Yagna?"

"But what would ye do with your wife?"

He started as though stung.

"Tell me true: will you give her poison?"

He caught her round the waist, showered kisses over all her face, and begged and entreated her to run away with him—somewhere—and be with him for evermore. He spoke a long while of his plans and hopes; he had suddenly caught hold of that idea—flight with her—as a drunken man catches at a fence to steady himself. He talked, too,



like a drunken man, for he was carried away by his feverish excitement. She heard him out, and then said, with frigid scorn:

"Because ye have forced sin upon me, do ye think me such a fool as to believe this nonsense?"

And though he swore he was but telling her the truth, and swore it by all holy things, she would not even listen, but shook herself free of him, and said:

"Not even do I dream of going. Why should I? Am I so ill off, though alone?" Throwing her apron over her head, she looked cautiously round. "'Tis late; I must hurry away."

"Wherefore in such haste? Will anyone come from your home for you?"

"But for you 'tis time: Hanka has made the bed, and yearns sorely!"

The words made him snarl like a dog.

"Of him that is waiting for you down there at the tavern," he said venomously, "I do not remind you."

"Know, then," she said, with biting emphasis, "that more than one is waiting: aye, and are ready to wait even till morning! You would have it you are the only one, forsooth! You are too saucy!"

"Then off with you—go! Go, even to that old Jew!" he almost spat the words at her.

But she stood there still. They were both together, panting heavily, staring one at the other out of eyes full of hate, each seeking what words might wound the other most deeply.

"Ye had something to say to me: say it now, for never will I meet you again."

"Fear not: never will I ask you!"

"I would not, were you to come whining at my feet!"

"Without doubt; you are too busy, having to meet so many every night."

At that, crying: "May you die the death of a dog!" she leaped over the stile and into the field.

He did not follow, nor call after her, but looked on as she

ran through the fields and disappeared like a shadow among the orchards; rubbed his eyes, as if only just waking, and grumbled in sullen ill humour:

"My wits are clean gone from me! Lord! how far astray a man can be led by a woman!"

On his return to the hut, he somehow felt extremely ashamed. He could not pardon himself for what he had done: it obsessed and haunted him cruelly.

His bed—made in the orchard, the heat and flies within doors being intolerable—was awaiting him.

But he could not sleep. He lay looking up at the stars that twinkled overhead, and listening to the quiet footsteps of the night . . . and . . . making up his mind about Yagna.

"Neither with nor without her can I live!" He cursed her under his breath, and sighed in pain, turning from side to side, throwing off his covering, and wetting his feet to cool them in the long dewy grass. But no sleep came, and his thoughts persecuted him as before.

In the hut, one of the children set up a wail, and Hanka murmured some words. He lifted his head; but soon all was still again. And then his mind began to swarm with thoughts; the memories of past joys came floating about him, like fragrant spring breezes. But he was not now to be their slave any more; now he could resist their charms, and contemplate them with calm deliberation, and in their very presence take a firm resolve, as solemn as if he were at Holy Confession.

"This must cease—and for ever!—'Tis a foul offence against God!—Would I have folk speak about me anew?—Am I not a landed man, a father?—Aye, I must—I must—end all this now."

He felt the resolve to be unutterably painful to keep; but he took it nevertheless.

And a bitter but deep reflection occurred to him: "Let a man but once go wrong, he may come to cling so to iniquity that even death itself will not part them!"

It was dawn now, and the sky seemed covered with a



mantle of grey cloth, but Antek was yet waking: and as soon as the daylight had come, Hanka appeared at his side. He looked at her with eyes full of sadness, but wonderfully gentle; and when she told him what the smith had called to let her know late the evening before, he passed his hand kindly over her unkempt hair.

"If the carting pays, I'll buy you something at the fair."

Such gracious behaviour on his part made her radiant with joy, and she pressed him hard to get her a glazed side-board, "such as the organist possessed."

"And soon ye'll be thinking of a sofa like those at the Manor!" he said, laughing; but, promising her all she wanted, he rose early, to put his neck under the yoke again, and take up the work which waited for him at all times.

He had a further talk with the blacksmith, and directly after breakfast sent Pete to cart dung afield, while he himself went to the wood with a couple of horses.

In the clearing, the work was going on with great alacrity. Many men were busy shaping the wood cut down in winter-time; the ceaseless strokes of the axes and rasping of the saws put one in mind of woodpeckers, tapping everlastingly. In the long grass of the glades, the horses of Lipka were grazing, and the smoke of their fires curled upward.

He recalled the scene which had taken place there, and, seeing the men of Lipka now working together in amity with the "nobles" of Rzepki and the others, he nodded his head.

"Misery has taught them its lesson: a needful one, was it not?" he said to Philip, Yagustynka's son, who was squaring a pine-log.

"But who was at fault save the Squire and the farmers?" the man growled sullenly, continuing to lop off the boughs.

"Rather, much rather, foolish spite and bad blood!" said Antek.

He stopped at the place where he had killed the forester, and swore softly to himself; for he felt the passion of yore stirring within him anew.

"The wretch! it is he that has brought me to this!—If I

could, I would serve him worse still!"—He spat angrily, and set to work.

All day long he went on carting timber to the sawmill, working as if for dear life: yet he could neither drive from his mind the remembrance of Yagna nor of his impending trial.

A few days after, he heard from Matthew that the Squire was willing not only to accept instalments, but to let them have other wood in addition to the big timber; and so Nastka's wedding had been put off until such time as Simon should be settled on his own land.

But other folk's affairs interested him little now; and the blacksmith, who visited him almost every day, was constantly terrifying him, speaking about his unhappy position, and promising him pecuniary help to escape, should he be in sore straits.

Antek was at such moments quite ready to throw everything up and flee; but again, looking round him at the countryside, and reflecting that flight would mean leaving all that for ever, he was panic-stricken, and would have preferred even the worst of prisons.

Yet the thought of a prison, too, filled him with despair.

All these inward struggles weighed him down, made him grow haggard and bitter, and harsh and fierce with those at home. What had come over him? Hanka did her very utmost, but to no purpose, to find this out. She had instantly suspected him of renewing relations with Yagna. But her own close scrutiny, and that of Yagustynka (whose fidelity was well paid) and others besides, assured her that the two were quite apart now, and never met: so she was at ease on that score. And yet, no matter how faithful a servant she proved herself, giving him the best food with the most exact punctuality, making the cottage a pattern of neatness and cleanliness, and the farm stock the very perfection of success—all would not do. He was always sullen, morose, ready to upbraid her for the slightest cause, and more than miserly of kind words. And it was worse still when he went about speechless, dreary, sad as an



autumn night—not angry, not ill-tempered—only sighing deeply; often spending his whole evening with his acquaintances in the tavern.

She durst not question him openly; and Roch vowed that he was aware of nothing wrong. It might well be the truth. The old man was now seen at their cottage only at night. The whole day he was going about with his books, teaching the peasants to pray to the Sacred Heart of Jesus—a devotion which the Russian Government had severely forbidden in church.

One evening, all being together at supper, the dogs set to barking furiously along the mill-pond. Roch laid his spoon down and listened attentively.

"Some stranger.—I'll go and see who it is."

He returned in a minute, very pale, and saying:

"Sabres are flashing along the road.—If I should be asked after, I am in the village."

And he slipped away amongst the orchard-trees.

Antek, white as a corpse, started to his feet. Dogs barked outside the fence; and men, heavily tramping, were heard in the porch.

"Have they come to fetch me?" he faltered, terror-struck.

They were all petrified: the gendarmes appeared on the threshold.

Motionless, Antek glanced at the open doors and windows. Luckily, Hanka had presence of mind enough to offer them settles and beg them to be seated.

They answered with civility enough, and at once threw out hints about supper, so that she had to prepare some scrambled eggs for them.

"Where are ye going so late?" Antek at length made bold to ask them.

"On duty! We have much to do," their leader returned, with a glance round him.

"After thieves, no doubt!" he continued, with more assurance, bringing a bottle out of the store-room.

"After thieves—and others. . . . Drink to us, goodman."

He did so. And then they set to upon the scrambled eggs, till their spoons scraped together the empty dish.

The inmates sat silent, like terror-stricken rabbits.

After cleaning the platter, they took another glass of vodka; and their leader, wiping his moustaches, said impressively:

"Is it long since ye were let out of prison, say?"

"Surely your Honour can answer that best."

He stirred impatiently; then, on a sudden:

"Where is Roch?" he asked.

"Which Roch?" was Antek's reply, who had understood on the spot, and felt much more at his ease.

"A certain Roch, I am told, is living with you."

"Can your Honour be speaking of that beggar who haunts our village?—'Tis true, his name is Roch."

The gendarme fidgeted again, and said with a threatening look:

"Play me no tricks, he is known to dwell with you!"

"Surely, he had his abode here at times, but elsewhere likewise. Where he happens to find himself, there he spends the night: 'tis his way. Now in the cabin, now in the byre, and oft beneath the hedges.—Is your Honour in any wise interested in the man?"

"I? In no wise: I ask to be informed."

"A good honest man he is," Hanka put in here; "nowhere does he trouble the waters."

"We know, we know well what manner of man he is!" he grumbled emphatically, and continued to seek for information about him by various arts—even going the length of offering them snuff. But they all answered so that he was just as wise as before; and in the end, finding himself no farther on the trail, he got up in a rage, crying:

"And I declare that the man dwells in your cabin!"

Here Antek blurted out: "Think ye I have him in my pocket?"

"Boryna!" the gendarme returned fiercely; "I am here on duty: understand that!"—But he took leave in more friendly



fashion, carrying with him as a present a dozen eggs and a very large pat of fresh butter.

Vitek followed them on their way step by step, and said afterwards how they had been at the Soltys's and the priest's, and had also tried to look in at several windows yet alight; only they could make no discoveries for the barking of the dogs, and had gone away as they came.

Now this incident had upset Antek to such a degree that, no sooner was he alone with his wife, than he told her his trouble.

She did not interrupt him by one single word, until at last he told her there remained nothing for him to do but to sell everything and go abroad—even to "Hamerica."

Then she stood up before him, pallid, ashen-white.

"I will not go!" she cried, with a dark frown. "No, nor let my children go either, to destruction! Not I! And if you think to force me, I'll cleave their skulls with an ax and leap down the well myself. And I am speaking the truth, so help me, O Lord God!" she screamed, kneeling down before the holy images, as one does to take a solemn vow.

"Hush, hush, dear!" Antek said. "I never meant it!"

She caught her breath, and continued, with difficulty restraining her tears:

"You will work out your time and come back. Fear nothing: I will manage all, and not lose one strip of land. Ye know me not as yet!—No, I will keep a firm grip on everything. And our Lord will help me to pull through with this affliction too." Then she wept silently.

He too was mute for a long while. At last he said:

"God's will be done! I must await my trial here."

And thus did all the blacksmith's scheming and treachery prove a dead failure.

## CHAPTER VI

“**L**IE still once for all, and trouble me not!” Matthew growled, rolling over on the other side in a bad temper.

Simon was quiet for a minute; but as soon as ever Matthew was snoring again, he slipped away behind the corn-bin; for they were sleeping in the barn, and he fancied he could see the first faint streaks of morning light.

He got at the tools that had been laid ready the evening before, groping for them in the dark; and he made such haste that some fell to the floor with a loud thud, and Matthew swore in his sleep.

Darkness still reigned over the land, though the stars were paling, and a little light glimmered in the east, and the first cocks were crowing, flapping their wings.

Simon carried off all his belongings in a wheelbarrow and, creeping stealthily by the hut, made his way round the pond, where all was still, save for the bubbling of the water through the lifted sluices.

The roads lay in the shadows of the orchards, so dark that scarcely a white wall was visible in places, and the mill-pond could only just be made out by the reflected stars.

As he passed his mother's cabin, he went slower, listening intently. Someone was going to and fro in the enclosure, muttering incessantly.

“Who's there?” He recognized his mother's voice.

He stood mute, with bated breath, not daring to stir until the old woman began to move once more, without waiting for his answer.

“She prowls by night, like a tormented soul!” he thought with a mournful sigh, and glided past in dread.

He could just see her—a shadow gliding on from tree to



tree, feeling her way with her stick, and mumbling some litany as she went along.

"The wrongs she has done me is gnawing, gnawing at her heart!" he said, with a strange sense of relief at the bottom of his soul, and went out into the broad road, all ruts and hollows. Once there, he walked on speedily, as if driven onwards, caring nothing either for ruts or for holes.

He never stopped till he got to the cross where the two roads leading to Podlesie met. It was too dark to do anything yet; so he sat down by the crucifix to wait and breathe a little.

"Plague on the hour, that lets one not distinguish field from wood!" he grumbled, casting his eyes around him. All about him was palpitating darkness: only above were there a few pale gold streaks.

Waiting was irksome, so he tried to say his morning prayer, but ever and anon, laying his hand upon the dew-drenched soil, forgot what words to say because of the pleasant thought which then would rush in upon him—that he was now on his own land, his own farm!

"I hold you now, nor ever will let you go!" he thought; and full of the courage and joy and infinite determination given by love, he let his ardent glances wander over the dark blurred expanse by the forest, where the six acres the Squire had sold him awaited his tillage.

"Dear orphan land, I will take you unto my heart, and never, whilst I have life, will I forsake you!" And as he spoke, he wrapped his sheepskin closer over his ragged garments. The cool of the night had been somewhat penetrating: he leaned back against the cross, and soon fell into a sound but noisy slumber.

When he leapt again to his feet, the fields were just growing visible, though yet indiscernible from a grey sheet of water, and the corn dripping with dew had touched him with its drooping wavy ears.

"'Tis broad day!—To work!" he said, stretching his limbs and kneeling down for a prayer before the cross; but this time not mechanically, as he usually did, to get it over

speedily. To-day it was otherwise, and he most fervently besought the Lord's help. With all his soul, embracing the feet of the Crucified Jesus, he entreated Him, his eyes earnestly fixed upon that sacred suffering face.

"Help, O merciful Jesus! My own mother has wrought me grievous wrong. I am Thine, I, a poor destitute orphan: come Thou to mine aid! Yes, I am sinful; but succour me, O Lord of mercy!—I shall order a Mass to be said—nay, two! Also I shall bring tapers; and—if I do well enough—will have a baldachin constructed for Thy service!" So he vowed, pressing his lips lovingly to the crucifix; and then walked round it on his knees and kissed the earth humbly—to rise up unspeakably refreshed and fortified.

And then, to the holding he was now entering upon, he cried out joyfully: "You shall see! Ha! You shall see!" It was situated at the edge of the wood, one side of it joining the fields of Lipka. But, Lord! what land! what land! A mere stretch of desolate wilderness, pitted all over with hollows from disused clay and sandpits, and overgrown with wild pear-trees, surrounded everywhere with thorns and brambles. On each eminence, torchweed, wild camomile, and dockweed grew in rank abundance, with (in places) a scraggy stunted pine-tree, or a clump of alders or juniper-bushes. On the lower grounds and in the swampy parts, there were reeds and bulrushes in luxuriant growth. In short, it was a piece of land that, as the saying is, "a dog might weep over." Even the Squire himself had advised Simon not to buy. He, however, had stood firm.

"'Tis just the thing for me! I shall make something of it!"

Matthew too, appalled at the sight of the bleak dreary waste, dissuaded him from purchasing it. "It was a bit of sterile moorland, fit only for the farm-yard dogs to celebrate their nuptials upon."—But Simon held out stubbornly, and ended the matter by saying:

"I have decided. Any soil is good, when there's a good pair of hands to work at it!"



He had taken it because of the low price—only sixty roubles per acre—and the Squire had promised besides to help him both with timber and otherwise.

"And what I said then, I stand by now!" he cried, and gazed round with beaming eyes. Setting the barrow down on the pathway, he walked round the borders of his territory, marked off by branches stuck into the ground.

Pacing on slowly, full of deep joy, he settled in his mind the order of his work: what to do, and with what to begin. It was for himself, for Nastka, for the whole future race of Paches, that he was about to work, and he felt as fiercely ravenous to begin as the wild wolf that has just seized a lamb and tasted its quivering flesh.

He then proceeded to choose carefully the situation of his cabin.

"Best build it over against the village, with the forest close on one side of it: so, 'twill be storm-protected, and the timber not so far to bring."

Having decided this, and marked the place of the four corners with stones, he threw off his sheepskin, crossed himself devoutly, spat on his hands and set himself to level the ground and fill the hollows left by the uprooted trees.

And now the day had risen, golden: cattle bellowed, well-sweeps creaked, and the fresh breeze, running over the corn, brought with it as usual the clatter of carts and the hum of voices. To none of these things did Simon pay any heed, but plunged furiously into his work, only at intervals stopping to straighten his back for a moment and wipe the sweat from his forehead. . . . Then he repeated his onset, with the clinging and insatiable pertinacity of a leech: all the while, according to his custom, talking to each object as if it were animated.

If he had to get a rock out of the earth:

"You," he would explain to it, "have lain and rested long: come, help to sustain my hut, 'tis high time."

Cutting down a blackthorn bush, he would remark, with a jeer:

"No use resisting, foolish one: you cannot withstand me. What, should I leave you standing here to tear my galligaskins?"

And to the wild old pear-trees he would say:

"Ye grow too close together, and must be moved; but ye shall make a floor for my byre, as good as Boryna's!"

Sometimes, stopping to breathe, he would gloat over the land with eyes of love, and whisper to it: "My own—oh, my own!"

For that soil, so weedy and barren, uncultivated and forsaken by all, he was full of pity, and would say caressingly, as though speaking to a child:

"Patience, have patience yet awhile: I'll till you, I'll make you fat, and you'll bear fruit like the other lands around you. Fear not: you shall be satisfied and rejoice."

The sun, now rising, shone straight into his eyes.

"Thanks, O Lord God!" he exclaimed, blinking; and added: "We shall still have dry hot weather for some time!" For the sun rose as red as red could be.

Far away, the Mass-bell rang, and the chimneys of Lipka were crowned with plumes of blue smoke.

"Have you a good appetite, eh?" he said to himself, and drew his girdle tighter, sighing mournfully. "But Mother will never bring you your breakfast any more!"

Other parts, too, of the Podlesie farm were now swarming with people, like him at work on their newly bought lands; and he saw Staho Ploshka, ploughing with a couple of strong horses.

"Oh," he thought; "dear Lord! if I could but have one of them!"

Joseph Vahnik was carting stones to lay the foundation of his hut; Klemba and his sons were digging a ditch round their holding; and Gregory, the Voyt's brother, was busy measuring something with a pole near the highway cross.

"That," Simon observed, "would be the very best place to build a tavern."

Gregory, having driven in stakes to mark off the places he had in mind, came up to greet Simon.



"Ho, ho!" he cried, his eyes round with amazement; "you're working as hard as ten, I see!"

"Can I do otherwise? what have I in the world? One pair of breeches and these two bare hands!"

He was surly, and would not interrupt his labours to talk. Gregory gave him some advice and went back to his own ground. After him came others, some to encourage him, some to gossip, some merely to smoke a cigarette and have a laugh; but they made Simon impatient, and he ended by flying out at Prychek:

"Ye might as well do your own work and not hinder others! Holiday-making on work-days—too much of a good thing!"

So they came no longer, and he remained alone.

It was blindingly bright, broilingly hot; and the sun had wrapped the world in a shimmering haze of light.

"Oh, but ye'll not drive me away so easily!" he said, addressing the sun; and then, perceiving Nastka, who was coming with his breakfast, he went to meet her, and pounced on the porringer with greedy hands.

Nastka, very far from cheerful, surveyed the fields.

"Why, what can ever grow on such wastes and moorlands?"

"Everything!—As you'll see. There will even be wheat for you to bake cakes of!"

"Oh, yes!—While the grass grows, the steed starves!"

"It will not, Nastka. We have our own land now; 'tis easier far for us.—Six whole acres!" he reminded her, eating away at full speed.

"Can we eat the earth?—How shall we get through the winter?"

"That's my affair: do not trouble. I have thought it all out, and shall find means."

He thrust away the empty pot, stretched himself, and led her off to see all and hear his explanations.

"This," he cried out gaily, "shall be the site of our cottage."

"Our cottage? Built of mud, perchance, like a swallow's nest?"

"Of wood and branches, and clay and sand, and whatsoever we can get: to last for a couple of years, till we are better off."

"Quite a Manor house, I see, you have in mind!" she replied in an unpleasant tone.

"Better dwell in one's own hovel than live in another man's house."

"Ploshka's wife desires us to spend the winter with her: she has offered us a room with a willing heart."

"A willing heart!—Willing, I know, to do anything to spite my mother, with whom she is always at odds.—Fear nothing, Nastka; I'll build you a hut, with window and fireplace all that is needful. You shall see: in three weeks from now, had I to work my arms to the stumps, it shall stand there, like Amen at the end of 'Our Father': yes, stand it shall."

"And, of course, you'll have to work by yourself?"

"Matthew will help: he has promised."

"Would not your mother," she faltered, "come in any way to your aid?"

"I would die rather than ask her!" he burst out; but at once, seeing how dejected she looked, he felt sorry and, sitting down at her side by a rye-field, stammered an explanation.

"How can I, Nastka? Me she has thrust out, and you she loads with curses!"

"But, good God! if she would but let us have one cow! We are like the very lowest of *Dziads*: with naught in the world! 'Tis fearful to think of."

"But, Nastka, there will be a cow: I have one already in mind."

"No hut . . . no cattle . . . nothing whatsoever!" she wailed, with her head upon his bosom, while he wiped her eyes and stroked her hair. All the time, he felt so sad that it was a wonder he himself could keep back his tears.—All



at once he seized his spade, sprang to his feet, and cried in feigned anger:

"Woman, fear God! There's so much work to do—and you do nothing—only complain!"

She, sorely troubled, rose with him, but care was gnawing at her heart, and made her say:

"Even should we not quite starve, the wolves will eat us in this wilderness."

This time, he felt seriously angry. Turning away to work, he threw her these sharp words:

"Better stay at home than come here to talk nonsense and whimper!"

She wanted to appease him, but he pushed her away.

"Dear Lord!" he thought. "Indeed, a woman is of the same blood with a man; but she hath not reason such as a man hath. Wealth falls from heaven, not by lamenting and wailing, but by working with our hands.—They are all like children, now weeping, now laughing, or drooping, or full of malice.—Dear Lord!"

He went on grumbling thus, till his work had absorbed him so that he forgot all else on earth.

And so things went with him day by day. He would rise at grey dawn, and go home late in the evening, and many was the day when he exchanged no word with any living soul. Teresa or someone else now brought him his meals; for Nastka was working at the priest's potato-field.

People came to see how he worked; but at a distance, for he disliked talking. His unwearied activity made them wonder.

"There's plenty of grit in the fellow: who'd have thought it?" Klemba grunted.

"And is he not of the seed of Dominikova?" someone replied with a laugh. But Gregory, who had watched him all along closely, observed:

"True it is, he works like an ox; but we, we ought to make things easier for the man."

"We ought," they assented; "and we must, for he de-

serves help." But no one put himself forward, everyone waiting for him to ask them first.

That Simon would not do, nor had even thought of doing. And so he was one morning in much amazement, seeing a cart come his way.

It was driven by Andrew, who called out merrily:

"Aye, it is I. Tell me where I am to plough!"

It was some time before Simon could believe his eyes.

"You, to have dared so greatly!—But you'll get beaten, poor fellow!—You'll see!"

"I care not. And if she beats me, I will come over to you for good."

"Did you get this thought all by yourself?"

"All by myself! For a long time I had been fain, but they watched me at first.—Yagna too advised me not to come."

He told him the whole affair in detail, while preparing to work; then they ploughed all day together; and, on going, he promised to return the next day.

So he did, with the rising sun. Simon noticed some slight discoloration on his brother's cheeks, but only questioned him after the day's work was done.

"Did she hurt you very much?"

"Oh, she's purblind, and cannot catch me easily; and then I do not put myself in the way of her claws," he answered, somewhat ruefully.

"And Yagna . . . she did not give you away?"

"Indeed no; she is not that sort."

"Ah, can anyone make out what a woman may take it into her head to do?" He sighed deeply, and told him not to come again.

"I can manage alone now. Later, at sowing-time, you will help me."

So he was alone again, working out his days one after another, like a horse turning a threshing-machine, and heedless both of the dreary solitude and the heat. For now it was growing hotter than it had ever been—a glow like hell, a conflagration. Scarcely anyone could work in the fields:



the skies poured down living fire. They were one sheet of scorching incandescence: no breeze blew, no birds sang, no human voice resounded, while the sun went steadily on from east to west, raining down heat and drought.

Yet Simon worked every day just as at the beginning; even sleeping afield of nights to lose no time in coming over. Matthew endeavoured to restrain him, but to no purpose. He replied, curtly:

"I shall rest on Sunday."

On Saturday evening he went home, but was so tired out that he fell asleep over his meal; and he slept almost the whole of the next day. He did not rise from his straw bed till the afternoon, when, dressing very finely, he sat down to a dinner of plentifully heaped-up dishes, with all the women in attendance about him, as about some grand personage, attentive to his least sign, and ever supplying him with more and more to eat; then he, having filled himself to the utmost, loosened his girdle, stretched his limbs in lordly fashion, and cried merrily: "Many thanks, good Mother!—And now, let us go and enjoy ourselves in some measure!"

So he started for the tavern with Nastka; and Matthew went too, along with Teresa.

Before him, the Jew bowed down to his waist, set vodka on the table without being asked, and called him "Master!" which puffed Simon up not a little. He drank as much as behoved him to drink, thrust himself amongst the foremost men there, and gave his opinion about everything.

The tavern was full, and the band playing to increase the enjoyment; but dancing had not as yet begun. They only drank one to another, and complained of the drought, of the hard times, and so on, as usual.

Even the Borynas and the smith and his wife came; but these engaged the private bar, where they must have enjoyed themselves pretty well; for the Jew was again and again taking vodka and beer in to regale them.

"Antek is staring at his wife to-day like a dog at a marrow-bone: he's not the same man any more!" Ambrose

grunted sullenly, glancing towards the parlour bar, from whence there arose a pleasant sound of joyful voices.

Yagustynka's reply came pat: "Because he prefers his own clog to a boot that goes on all men's feet!"

"Aye," someone returned; "but such boots do not pinch!" And the whole tavern was in a roar; they all knew well who was meant.

Simon had not heard and did not laugh. Somewhat the worse for liquor, he was putting his arms round Andrew's neck, and saying to him:

"And you must now remember what I am, and be obedient to me!"

"I . . . I know well," the other stammered, with maudlin tears. "But then, Mother commands . . . commands . . ."

"Mother counts no longer! I am a landholder: hearken unto me!"

But now the band had struck up a dancing-tune; and as heels began to stamp and boards to resound and couples to spin, Simon seized Nastka by the waist, threw his capote open, set his cap at an angle, and, bawling "Da dana!" with the best of them, and stamping the loudest of all, he launched into the dance, whirling giddily and rolling along, blithe, noisy, clamorous—like a torrent in spate!

But, after a dance of two, he let the women take him home, where—presently completely sobered—he sat down outside the cabin. Yagustynka joined him and had a good long talk with him; and it so fell out afterwards that, although the hour was late, and Simon had thought of returning, he was no longer in any hurry, but waited, hovering and dangling about Nastka, and sighing like a furnace.

At last her mother said to him!

"Stay with us, spending the night in the barn: whereunto should you trudge about by night?"

"I'll make him a shake-down in the shed," said Nastka.

"Do not be so hard on him, Nastka!" Yagustynka said with a leer.

"What . . . what are ye thinking of? What next, I wonder!" she rapped out, greatly troubled.



"Hey-day! Is he not your swain? To forestall the wedding a day or two is no harm. . . . And then, the poor man, who works for you like an ox, ought surely to have some reward!"

"Oh, how true! Nastka! Nastka!" he cried, as she fled, and leapt after her and caught her, with many a kiss and entreaty, and held her fast.

"Would you drive me from you, Nastka darling? drive me away on such a night?"

Her mother had suddenly something to do in the passage; and Yagustynka withdrew, saying:

"Forbid him not, Nastka! There's so little happiness on earth: what comes—rare as the grain of corn a blind hen finds—pass it not by!"

In the enclosure she crossed Matthew, who, making a shrewd guess, called out to Simon within:

"I should never have had your patience!"

But next daybreak saw Simon hard at work again, and indefatigable. Only, when Nastka brought him his breakfast, he was even more greedy for a kiss from her cherry lips than for the porringer.

"If you do betray me, you'll be scalded soundly!" But while she threatened so, she was nestling to his bosom.

"Nastka, mine you are, and never will I let you go!" he bleated earnestly; and, looking into her eyes, added in a low voice: "The first must be a boy!"

"A simpleton you are! But who put all these naughty thoughts into your head?"—And, pushing him away, she ran off, her face all scarlet. Not far off, Mr. Yacek had appeared, pipe in mouth and violin tucked under his arm. He came up, "praised God," and asked him a few questions. Simon, much elated, bragged about what he had achieved, but stopped all at once, rolling the eyes of bewilderment. Mr. Yacek had laid down his violin, taken off his coat, and set to work, stirring and softening a mass of clay! Simon's shovel fell and his jaw dropped.

"What is't ye wonder at?"

"What, shall Mr. Yacek work with me?"

"I shall, and will help you to build your hut. Think you I cannot?—You will see."

Henceforth they worked together. The old man had indeed not much strength, and was little wont to labour; but he had such ingenious ways that the work went on far better and more swiftly. And Simon obediently followed all his directions, now and then muttering:

"Heavens! this is unlike anything ever seen! A Squire!"

Mr. Yacek only smiled, and then, entering into talk with him, told him such wonderful things about this world of ours that Simon, had he only dared, would have fallen at his feet in wonder and gratitude. And in the evening, he ran to tell Nastka all about it, concluding:

"Folk call him silly: yet he is as full of wisdom as any priest!"

"There be some that talk wisely, yet act foolishly. What, would he come peradventure to aid ye if he had all his wits? And would he tend Veronka's kine?"

"That, indeed, I cannot make out."

"Save by saying he has lost his senses."

"At any rate, he is the best man in the world."

Simon was immeasurably grateful to him for his kindness. Yet, for all their working together, and eating from the same vessel, and sleeping beneath the same covering, there was nothing of familiarity in their fellowship.

"He always belongs to the race of the Squires," Simon said to himself, with profound respect and thankfulness. With his help the hut rose up, even as a loaf rises which has been leavened; and when Matthew had likewise come to assist them, and Adam, son of Klemba, brought all they required from the forest, the building was soon to be seen distinctly from Lipka, so splendidly did it get on. Matthew worked hard for nearly the whole week, directing the others' toil; and when (on Saturday afternoon) it was quite finished, he put up a cluster of green boughs on the chimney-top, and went off to some other work of his own.

Then Simon whitewashed the cottage, and swept the shav-



ings and rubbish away. And Mr. Yacek came with his violin under his arm, saying with a smile:

"The nest is ready: bring the mother-bird!"

Simon answered: "Our wedding is to-morrow after evensong," and fell at his feet to thank him.

"Oh, but I have not worked for nothing! When they send me away from the village, I come to lodge with you!" And, lighting his pipe, he strolled away to the forest.

Simon, though all was finished, still pottered about the hut, stretching his weary limbs, and gazing upon it with an unexpected intensity of joy.

"Mine! Aye, mine!" he repeated; and, apparently not believing his own eyes, he would touch the walls, walk round, peep in at the window, and sniff the raw pungency of the whitewash and the clay. It was late in the evening when he returned to Lipka to get ready for the next day.

Everybody knew about his wedding, and Dominikova had been informed by a neighbour, though she made out not to have caught what was said.

Early on Sunday morning, Yagna several times slipped away from her mother's hut, carrying various articles in bundles quietly out through the garden, and taking them over to Nastka. The old dame, though quite conscious of what was going on, did nothing at all to prevent it, but went to and fro in silence, with so sombre an air that Andrew only ventured to approach her after High Mass. Which he did with great caution, and not very close.

"Mother, I am going out."

"Better drive the horses to clover!"

"Know ye not? . . . 'tis to Simon's wedding."

"Praised be God, 'tis not yours!" she answered bitterly.

"—Well, but only get tipsy, and you'll see what I'll do to you!" With that threat, she groped her way out to a neighbour's, while the young man put on all his finery.

"Yes, I will! . . . I will get tipsy, if only to spite her!" he growled, scurrying fast to Matthew's cottage, just as they were all setting out for church. But it was a very quiet

wedding: neither songs nor shouts nor music. In the church, too, there were only a couple of tapers: Nastka shed many a tear of shame, and Simon shot angry challenging glances round him at the few that were present. Luckily, when it was all over, the organist played them out with such a strain of music as almost set their feet a-dancing, and made their souls within them merry and jocund.

The wedding over, Yagna went back at once to her mother, and only looked in from time to time; Matthew performed on his fiddle, Pete accompanied him on the flute, and another beat the kettle-drum for them with fierce energy. They began to dance, even within the little cabin, and so many of the guests as felt inclined tripped it also to and fro outside, amongst the tables that had been set up. There was some eating, some healths drunk and conversation enough. All was quiet, though; for in broad daytime and with unflustered heads, they felt in no mood for noise.

Simon clung close to his wife, taking her into corners and kissing her so violently that they made fun of him; and Ambrose, in a bad temper, grunted:

"Poor fellow! enjoy yourself to-day; to-morrow you shall have to pay your score." And as he spoke, his greedy eyes followed the glass as it went round.

There was really no great life in the party; besides, no considerable merry-making could be expected, since many, having taken a little and sat for some time, as the rules of good breeding demanded, retired to their homes as soon as sundown set the sky on fire. Matthew, however, was very blithe and jolly, playing, singing, pressing girls to dance with him, and passing the vodka round; and when Yagna showed her face, he was her constant companion, ogling her, and talking, and utterly careless of the tears that glistened in Teresa's eyes.

Yagna, indifferent to the man, had no reason to hold off. She merely listened patiently to him, while on the watch for the coming of the Borynas, whom she wished not to meet. Fortunately they did not come; nor, indeed, did any of the first-class landholders. These, nevertheless,



not having refused the invitation, had (as was proper) sent various presents in aid of the wedding-feast. Their absence being remarked upon, Yagustynka made a characteristic reply:

"Had there but been dainties in plenty, and a cabin all reeking with vodka, there would have been no keeping them out, even with a stick! But dry tongues and empty paunches please them not."

She was by this time somewhat elevated and mischievous: so, having noticed Yasyek Topsy-turvy sitting in a corner by himself, sighing miserably, wiping his nose, and eyeing Nastka from a distance, she drew him out to address her and so make sport.

"Dance with her, and take what may be had! Your mother would not let you marry her; but frisk around her now she has a goodman, and she may requite your love!"

Then she poured forth such talk as made the ears tingle; and when Ambrose, having got enough to drink by now, began to wag his tongue likewise, they set the ball rolling together, and made everybody shake with mirth, till the short summer night, spent in fun and frolic, came unexpectedly to an end.

And now no one remained but the family (and Ambrose, bent on draining the very last drop left in the bottles). The young couple decided to start at once for their new home. Matthew wished them to stay a little longer; but Simon, who had borrowed a horse and cart of Klemba, would not hear of it. So he bundled lockers and vessels and bedding into the cart, seated Nastka in state on the top, knelt down for her mother's blessing, and, with a kiss for his brother-in-law and a profound salute to the others, crossed himself, whipped up the horse, and started off: the whole family accompanying him.

They walked on in silence, till, close to the mill, a couple of storks were seen circling high in air above their heads. The old dame clapped her hands at the sight, and said:

"Knock on wood! Here's the best foreboding for you, and ye shall have children in plenty!"

Nastka, reddened slightly; but Simon, who was pushing behind the cart, whistled jauntily, and threw exultant glances around him.

When at last they were alone, Nastka, looking at her new home, burst into tears at the sorry sight. But Simon cried:

"No crying, silly! Other folk have still less: they are envying you!"

He was very much worn out, and somewhat in his cups. So he flung himself down on some straw in a corner, and was soon snoring loud . . . while she, sitting near the window and looking down at the white cottages of Lipka, went on shedding tears.

This melancholy state of mind did not, however, last very long. All the village folk seemed to have plotted together to come to her aid. Klemba's wife came first, with a hen under her arm, and a brood of little chickens in a basket. It was a good beginning; and almost daily one of the goodwives looked in, and never a one of them empty-handed.

Their kindness touched her heart.

"Dear people," she said, "how can I ever repay you?"

"A word of hearty thanks will do," replied Sikora's wife, who had brought her a piece of linen cloth.

"When ye are at your ease, ye can pass it on to someone that is also in want," added Ploshkova, producing a goodly piece of bacon from under her apron.

So many presents did she receive that she had enough for a long, long time. And one evening, at dusk, Yasyek Topsy-turvy brought her his dog Kruchek, which he tied up close to her hut, and then took to his heels, as if in fear of some harm that might come.

They laughed heartily, as they told Nastka about this; but she curled a disdainful lip.

"At the noonday rest, Nastka, he had been gathering berries for you; and his mother took them away from him!"



## CHAPTER VII

YAGUSTYNKA went to the Borynas'. She had gathered some wild strawberries, and brought them for Yuzka. Hanka was then milking the cows outside the hut; so she sat down under the eaves and told her of all the presents Nastka had got.

"But," she concluded, "they all do this to spite Dominkova."

"And," Hanka corrected, "to help Nastka also.—By the by, I too ought to take her something or other."

"If ye have aught that I can take now, I'll do it willingly," Yagustynka told her. And then from inside the cabin was heard a faint voice of entreaty—Yuzka's.

"O Hanka, give her my young sow! I know I am going to die, and then Nastka will say a prayer for my soul!"

The idea struck Hanka as good; she directly told Vitek to drive the little sow over to Nastka's, for she did not feel inclined to go herself.

"Vitek," Yuzka cried, "tell her the sow is from me. And she must come quick to see me: I cannot move now."

The poor girl was very plaintive and querulous. She had been in bed for a week, sick of a fever, all her body covered with crusts and scales. At first they had let her lie under the orchard trees, for she had begged them very hard. But she had grown so much worse that Yagustynka had forbidden this.

"You must lie in the dark," she said; "the sunlight drives all the ill humours inside."

So, moaning and groaning and complaining feebly that no children nor any friends of hers were allowed to come in, she lay alone in the darkened room. And Yagustynka, now constituted her guardian, drove away any that tried to come in, even taking a stick to them!

Having spoken thus with Hanka, she gave the strawberries to the sick child, and prepared an ointment for her, made up of pure buckwheat meal, mixed with much fresh unsalted butter, and many egg-yolks. With that, she smeared Yuzka's face and neck, laying it on very thick, and covering all with wet cloths. The child submitted passively to the treatment, only asking with some apprehension:

"Will not the sores leave pock-marks on my face?"

"Only do not scratch at them, and they will leave none.—As it was for Nastka."

"But they sting me so, O Lord! . . . Then pray bind my hands fast, else I shall not be able to bear the pain!" And as she begged very earnestly, and could scarce refrain from tearing at her cheeks, the old woman, muttering an incantation over her, fumigated her with the smoke of dried house-leek, bound her arms to her sides, and went off to work.

Yuzka lay still, listening to the hum of the flies—and another strange buzzing, too, which ever and anon sounded within her head. She also, as in a dream, now and then heard someone of the household coming in to look at her and going away on tiptoe. And then she fancied there were boughs, laden with rosy apples, that hung very low above her head, but she was powerless to reach up and snatch them; and then a flock of sheep came crowding around her, bleating pitifully . . . but Vitek came into the room, and she knew him at once.

"Have you taken to Nastka my little sow?—What did she say?"

"Why, she rejoiced over it so, she came near kissing its tail!"

"Ye naughty fellow! Making fun even of Nastka!"

"But I say true!—And she bade me tell you she will be here to-morrow."

All at once, Yuzka began to toss to and fro, crying out in dismay:

"Drive them off!—They'll trample me down!—Baa! Baa! Baa!"

Then of a sudden she collapsed, lying still as in sleep.



Vitek went out, but returned at frequent intervals. Once she asked him anxiously:

"Is it noon yet?"

"Nearer midnight: everybody is asleep."

"True: 'tis dark."

"Take those sparrows away: they are chirping like unfledged birds."

He was just telling her something about their nests, when she screamed and sat up.—"Where's Grey One? Vitek, let it not stray, or Father will thrash you!"

Then she told him to come near her, and talked to him in a whisper: "Hanka forbade me to go to Nastka's wedding; yet will I go in despite of her . . . dressed in a dark-blue corset . . . and the skirt I wore for the Indulgence. . . . Vitek! pluck me some apples; but only let Hanka not catch you." Then she was all at once still, as though plunged in swift sleep.

Vitek was for hours at her side, brushing flies away and giving her water. Hanka had told him to stay at home, and watch over her, while little Matthias, Klemba's son, tended Boryna's cattle along with his father's.

The want of the free forest air made itself felt sorely to the boy; but, deeply affected as he was by Yuzka's state, he would (as they say) have pulled the sky down for her, and have done anything to interest her and make her laugh.

One day, he brought her a whole covey of little partridges.

"Yuzka, stroke them! stroke them, and they will cry *pew-pew* to you!"

"How can I?" she moaned, raising her head.

He undid her, and she took up the fluttering unfledged birds in those poor feeble nerveless hands of hers, and pressed them to her face and eyes.

"Ah, how their souls throb within them! How frightened they are, poor things!"

"What? I myself caught them, and shall I let them go?" he protested, unwilling to do so. Yet he did.

Another time, he brought her a leveret, that he placed

on the down coverlet over her, holding it up by the ears.

"Dear little leveret, sweet little leveret, taken away from your mother!" she whispered, holding it close to her bosom, like an infant in arms, and stroking and fondling it tenderly. But the animal screamed as if tortured, and, escaping from her hands, jumped out into the passage amongst a lot of fowls that took tumultuously to flight, rushed out of the porch just in front of Lapa, that was dozing inside, and away into the orchard. The dog was hot in pursuit instantly; Vitek followed, shouting; and the noise and uproar were so great that Hanka came out of the farm-yard: while Yuzka laughed almost to split her sides.

"And did the dog get it?" she asked, with anxiety.

"A likely thing!" he exclaimed. "No; he just saw its scut and no more, when it vanished into the depths of the corn, as a stone disappears in the water.—A splendid runner it is.—Do not be sad, Yuzka; I will get you another."

Whatever he could find, he brought to her: now a lot of gold-besprinkled quails, now a hedgehog, now a tame squirrel that leapt about the room the most funnily in the world; or a brood of young swallows, twittering so very sorrowfully that the parent birds flew after them into the room, and Yuzka ordered him to restore them to the nest; and many another curious thing; besides apples and pears, as many as they both could manage to eat without their elders' knowing.—But everything at last wearied her, and she turned away tired and caring no more for anything.

"All this is naught to me! bring me something new!" she would murmur, turning even from the stork, as it strutted about the room, poking its beak into every pot and pan, or placed itself in ambush for a sudden thrust at Lapa in the doorway.—Once only, when he brought her a rainbow-hued bee-eater, caught alive, did she enjoy the sight a little.

"What a magnificent bird! It looks as if painted!"

"Only take care lest it peck your nose: 'tis an ill bird to tackle."

"But it does not even try to get away.—Is it tame?"



"No, but I have bound its wings and legs."

The bird amused them for some time; but it pined away, sat motionless, and, refusing to eat, died shortly, to the great sorrow of all in the household.

So the days went by.

Outside, it was slowly getting hotter and hotter still: men could hardly do anything in the fields by day; nor was the night anything but a stifling time spent in a vast oven: even out of doors and in the orchards, it was so. The drought was swiftly becoming a disaster. The cattle came back to their sheds, lowing and hungry from the pasture-lands. Potatoes were withering to the size of hazelnuts; there were fields wherein the stunted oats rose but a few inches above the ground; the blades of barley were sere; and the rye, untimely dried up, was white with grainless ears. In deep trouble, therefore, they would look, each sunset, in desolate hope, for some indication of a coming change in the weather. But not a cloud hung in the sky. Above them there was only a glassy whitish glare; and the sun would go down unveiled by the faintest shadow of vapour.

Many a one now wept fervently at the altar of our Lord's Transfiguration, before the holy images; but unavailingly. The fields grew ever more parched, more scorched; the fruits fell unripe from the trees; and so little water now went down the stream that both flour-mill and sawmill stood closed, silent and dreary: while the people, reduced to desperation, united, each man paying his quota for a grand votive Mass, with exposition of the Holy Sacrament!

So heartily and so fervently did they put up their prayers that not even a heart of stone could have remained untouched.

And indeed our Lord did have mercy on them. True, the next day was so sultry, so perspiring, so fiercely glowing that birds fell fainting to the earth, oxen lowed plaintively over the pasturelands, horses would not come out from their stables, and men, wearied and worn, crawled about the dried-up orchards, unwilling to quit the shade. But it

came to pass that—at the very point of noon, when everything seemed about to breathe its last in that white-hot fiery furnace—there came a sudden mist, troubling the brightness of the sun and obscuring it, as if a handful of ashes had been flung over its disk; and shortly there was heard a sound as of the wings of many birds high in air, and livid masses of clouds assembled from every quarter, more lowering and more full of grim menace every instant.

Now fear breathed in every bosom; and all were still and hushed, though thrilled with apprehension.

Many thunders muttered with far-away voices; and then arose a gale, and the dust got up in multitudinous whorls, close and compact; the sun shed a sickly glare, of a sandy yellow hue. And then all rapidly grew dark, and the heavens were filled with swarms of lightnings—as if someone were cracking fiery whip-lashes in the sky. And with the falling of the first thunderbolt the people came rushing out of their houses.

Immediately a great tumult sprang up. The sun was now quite invisible, in the wild confusion of an indescribable whirlwind, in which, amid entangled masses of pitchy darkness, there poured forth shaft after shaft of dazzling splendour; thunder, rolling and roaring, came with the flashes of lightning; then, the rattling downpour, and the howling of the blasts in the trees.

Thunderbolt followed thunderbolt with blinding brilliancy; the rain fell in such sheets that all was hid from sight; flaws of hail went passing here and there.

This lasted for about an hour. The corn was lodged, the roads had turned to frothy turbid streams by now. Then it slackened a little, and brightened up; but once more the thunder rattled like ten score carts trundling over hard-frozen ground—and the rain again poured down, like water from a tub.

People peered out of their huts in alarm. In some cabins, consecrated lamps were lit, and the hymn, "We fly to thy protection, holy Mother," was sung; while the holy images had been brought out of others, as a safe-guard against the



powers of evil abroad. And, thank God! the storm passed away, without doing very much harm. Only, when it was nearly over, and the drops of rain began to fall less frequently, there came, from a lonely cloud which hung quite at the end of the village, a bolt of fire that fell on the Voyt's granary!

At once, flames and smoke burst forth from the building, and people ran to the place in dismay. There was no hope of saving it, from the very beginning, and the fire devoured it as it would have done a heap of dry splinters of wood; but Antek and Matthew, together with the rest, worked away with frantic energy to save Koziol's hut and the adjacent buildings. Happily the roads were streaming with rain-water; for several thatches had begun to smoke, and from the doomed granary sparks flew abroad thick and fast.

The Voyt was from home: since morning he had been in town on official business. But his wife was there, desperate over her loss, grieving and running about in every direction like a scared hen. And when the danger had passed, and the people were going home, who should approach her but Kozlova, with arms a-kimbo, and mouth full of loud fierce gibes!

"See ye? The Lord has punished ye for the wrong ye did me, Madam Voyt! Aye, that He has!"

There would have been a fight, for the other rushed at her, with claws stretched forth; but Antek succeeded (not without difficulty, though) in parting them. Then he abused Kozlova in such strong terms that she, like a well-thrashed dog, went back to her hut growling and snarling:

"Yes, Madam Voyt! puff yourself up, do! I shall get my own back, and with good interest!"

Now by this time the storm had rolled away to the woodlands, and the sun had come out again. A flock of white clouds moved athwart the blue sky; the air was cool and fresh, and the birds sang; while the people went forth to mend the damage done, and open the sluices.

Unexpectedly, and almost close to his cabin, Antek had

met Yagna, carrying a hoe and a basket. He greeted her cordially; she glared at him like a wolf, and passed on in silence.

"So haughty as that?" he grumbled angrily; and then, seeing Yuzka in the enclosure, rated her soundly for being out in the damp.

She was indeed so much better by now that they had permitted her to lie in the orchard all day long. Her sores were healing beautifully, and leaving no scars, and it was only in secret that Yagustynka continued to anoint her as before, Hanka grudging so great a consumption of butter and eggs.

So she lay, getting well slowly, almost all day long by herself, Vitek now tending the cows again. Only now and then did a girl look in for a while, or Roch sit with her for a little; or old Agata would come to say, as usual, that she was going beyond doubt to die in harvest-time, in Klemba's cabin, and as a peasant dame should die. But her most frequent companion was Lapa, that always watched by her side, the stork, that would come at her call, and the birds which flew down to her for crumbs.

One day, when no one was in the hut, Yagna came to her with a handful of caramels; but before Yuzka had time to thank her, she had taken to flight on hearing Hanka's voice somewhere, crying over the hedge:

"May they do ye good!"—She had vanished.

She then ran over to her brother's, carrying something for him.

She found Nastka beside a cow that was drinking water out of a tub. Simon was building an outhouse close by, and whistling with all his might.

"What!" she exclaimed, very much surprised; "have you got a cow so soon?"

"We have: is she not a beauty?" returned Nastka, very proud of her.

"Really, a very fine one: she must be of Manor stock. Where did ye buy her?"

"Though we have not bought her, yet she is ours! I'll



tell you all—but you'll never believe me.—Yesterday at dawn, I was aware of something that rubbed against the cabin wall, and thought it might be some hog driven out to the pasture-lands, that was cleaning its sides from caked mire. So I lay down anew, but was not yet asleep, when I heard a faint sound of lowing. I went out; and behold, there stood by the door a cow, tethered, with a bundle of clover in front of her, her udders full, and her face turned up to me. I rubbed mine eyes, thinking this to be some dream of the night. But no: 'twas a live cow, lowing and licking my fingers. Then I felt sure she had strayed from some herd; and Simon too said they would be coming for her in a trice. Only there was one thing:—shē was tied up. Could a cow tie herself up in any wise?—But noon came, and no one to take her away, and the milk was oozing from her udders by then: so I eased the poor beast. I asked through the village; no one knew anything of a cow lost. Old Klemba said it might well be some thieves' trick, and I had better take her to the *gendarmie*. I was sorry, but what else was I to do?—Then, when noon came next day, Roch came too, and said:

"You are honest and you are needy; therefore hath the Lord Jesus blessed you with a cow!"

"A cow falling from the sky! Not even an idiot can believe that."

"Roch laughed, and, preparing to depart, said:

"The cōw's your own: have no fear! None shall take her from you."

"Then I thought she was his gift, and fell at his knees to thank him; but he shrank back.

"And if you should meet Mr. Yacek," he continued with a smile, 'beware of thanking him: he's a man to lay about him with a stick, for he loves not to be thanked.'"

"Then 'twas Mr. Yacek who gave you the cow!"

"Is there another man in the world so kind to poor folk?"

"True, it was he gave Staho the timber for his hut, and helped him in so many other ways."

"A holy man he is, no doubt, and daily I will pray for him."

"But take heed lest any should steal her from you!"

"What, steal my cow? I would go over all the world to seek her, and tear the thief's eyes out! Our Lord would never permit such a wrong!—While Simon is building the shed, I'll have her in to sleep with us every night. And Yasyek's dog, Kruchek, will take care of her.—O my dear one, O my darling!" she cried, taking her round the neck and kissing her pink muzzle; while the animal uttered a faint gurgling sound, the dog barked with joy, the fowls cackled for fear, and Simon whistled louder than all.

"Beyond all doubt, then, ye are blessed of the Lord," Yagna said, looking intently at them both, with a sigh of something like compunction. They both seemed changed beyond recognition; Simon especially. He had always passed for an incapable fellow, who bore the blame of all that went wrong; and anyone that cared to wipe his feet on him could do so.—And now! Able in speech, wise in his acts, and dignified in his bearing, he was really not the same man! . . .

After a long silence: "Which are your fields?" she inquired.

Nastka pointed them out to her, telling her what they were going to sow, and where.

"But whence is the seed to come?"

"Simon says we shall get it; and so we shall. Because he speaks no idle words."

"He's my own brother; but what ye say seems told of someone else!"

"So good, so clever, so hard-working! . . . There's none like him, none!" Nastka declared most emphatically.

"Surely," Yagna mournfully assented.—"And whose are those fields with the mounds marking their boundaries?"

"Antek Boryna's. Not worked at present, though, for they await the division of the farm."

"There will be a goodly bit of land for them, and a most comfortable holding."



"Oh, may our Lord, for their kindness to us, render them back tenfold! Antek stood surety with the Squire for our payment of the instalments, and has helped us in many another way."

"Antek! . . . Surety for payment!" She was astounded.

"And Hanka is not less kind: she has given me a young sow. 'Tis only a sucking-pig now, but of good stock, and will grow up to be of great use to us."

"Indeed, you tell me of a marvellous thing. Hanka give you a sucking-pig? 'Tis simply incredible."

They returned to the hut, where Yagna, having taken a ten-rouble note out of her kerchief, handed it to Nastka.

"Here's a trifle . . . I could not bring it before . . . the Jew had not yet paid me for my geese."

They thanked her very warmly, and Yagna said, on leaving:

"Wait a little; Mother will relent, and let you have some of the property."

"I do not want it! Let her take the injury she has done me down to her grave with her!" Simon burst out, so suddenly and with such vehemence that she left without one word more, and went home, moody, depressed, and not a little out of sorts.

"What am I? A dry stick that no one cares for," she sighed forlornly, as she went.

About half-way home, she met Matthew. He was going to his sister, but went back with her and listened attentively to what she said of Simon.

"Not all men are so well off," he remarked gloomily.

They talked on, but he did not feel at his ease. He was longing to say something to her, but embarrassed how to say it; Yagna was meanwhile looking down at Lipka, bathed in the sundown glow.

Then he said: "In this narrow little world, I feel stifled to death!" He was almost speaking to himself.

She turned to him with a questioning look.

"What ails you? Your face is as wry as if you had been drinking vinegar!"

On that, he told her how he loathed his life and the country and all things, and was determined to go away and wander forth into the world.

"Why, if you will have a change, then marry!" she said, laughing.

"Aye, if she of whom I think would but have me!" he cried, staring eagerly into her eyes; but she, confused and unpleasantly impressed, looked aside.

"Ask her! Anyone would be glad to marry you: more than one already expects your messengers."

"And what if she should refuse me?—The shame—the pain of it!"

"In that case, you'd send your men with vodka to someone else."

"I am not that sort. I would only have one, and cannot turn to another."

"Oh, a young man has much the same liking for every girl, and would fain come to close quarters with them all."

This he did not deny; but presently, changing his mode of attack:

"Yagna, you know that the boys only wait for your mourning-time to end; men will at once be sent to you with vodka."

"Let them drink it themselves! I'll marry no one of them!" she declared, with so much energy as to made him think deeply. She spoke her mind: she cared for none of them; only for Yanek—her Yanek!

The thought of him made her sigh, and she gave herself up to it with delight, while Matthew, baffled, went back to his sister.

And Yagna looked into vacancy with wandering eyes of unrest, saying to herself:

"What—what is he doing at this moment?"

On a sudden, someone had seized and was hugging her close in his arms. She struggled violently.

"Will you not console me for my loss?" the Voyt whispered passionately.

Raging, she tore herself from his clutch.



"Touch me but once more, I'll tear your eyes out and call the whole village here to you!"

"Hush, Yagna, hush! See, I bring you a present!" and he pressed into her hand a necklace of coral.

"Put it . . . !" Her exasperation may be some excuse for what she said. "All your gifts are mere rubbish to me!"

"But, Yagna, what—what means this?" he stammered, stupefied.

"It means this much: ye are a hog! And are never to speak to me any more!"

She broke away from him in a towering passion, and rushed home.

Her mother was peeling potatoes; Andrew was milking the cows, out of doors. She set herself busily to perform her evening duties, though still trembling all over with anger and unable to calm herself; and as soon as the twilight had gathered, she went out to roam again, saying to her mother:

"I am going to look in at the organist's."

Soon she beheld the windows of Yanek's room, shining bright in the darkness; there Michael was writing under the suspended lamp, while the organist and his dame sat outside the house, taking the cool of the evening.

They greeted her with the news: "Yanek is to be here to-morrow afternoon!"

The bliss of it nearly made her fall senseless at their feet. Her knees bent under her; her heart beat so fast that she could scarcely breathe. Having sat with them a few minutes for courtesy's sake, she fled away along the poplar road and towards the wood, swift as a hunted beast. . . . "Lord! Lord!" she burst out in strange thanksgiving: she stretched forth her arms, tears gushed from her eyes, and a marvellous feeling of gladness came over her, so intense that it gave her a longing to laugh, to scream out, to run like mad, and kiss the trees around her and the fields beneath, that lay silvery in the moonlight!

"Yanek is coming—is coming—is coming!" she crooned to herself, darting forward suddenly with the rapidity of a

bird, and running on, impelled by her desires and her anticipations, as if towards the achievement of her destiny, and towards ineffable delight.

When she got home, it was late. All the village was dark except Boryna's hut, where many people had assembled to debate; and as she went, she thought only of the morrow and of Yanek's return.

Back in the hut, she could not fall asleep. As soon as she heard her mother's rasping stertorous breath, she ceased from tossing on her pillow, and went to sit out of doors and await there either slumber or daybreak.

She could now and again catch the sound of voices at Boryna's, across the water, and, one side of his hut being lighted, she perceived the tremulous reflection of the light in the pond opposite her.

Her eyes fixed on this, she forgot about all things . . . lost in a multitude of dreary thoughts that wrapped her about like gossamer tissues, and carried her away with them into the universe of unsatiable yearnings!

The moon was down, the country-side of a murky brown tint. Many stars shone on high; and from time to time one of them would fall with such swiftness and from so enormous a height as to thrill every limb of her with dread. Sometimes a faint breeze swept gently by, like the touch of tender hands; and then the pleasant waft, warm and odorous, coming up from the fields, made her stretch and stiffen her body in the voluptuous enjoyment of that fragrance.

Absorbed, entranced in this reverie, of which no words can tell the sweetness, she remained immobile, like a swelling shoot of some young plant, gathering within itself hoards of sap and vegetable life. . . . And the night passed on, silent and careful, as it were, not to disturb human nature in its rapturous bliss.

Within Antek's cabin, the men that held with him and Gregory were talking of the assembly that was to take place next day at the District Office, and to which the Voyt had convened all the farmers of Lipka.

There were about a score of peasants there—the whole



party of Antek and Gregory—lighted only by one small candle that glimmered on the penthouse of the chimney.

Roch, who sat in the shadow, was explaining at length the results of opening the school in Lipka as proposed; and Gregory was telling each man in particular how to vote and what to say to the head of the District.

They laid their heads together for a long time, with many objections and some opposition; but in the end they agreed entirely, and then separated before dawn, for they would have to rise pretty early in the morning.

So Yagna remained alone awake outside the cottage, still plunged in the night of her reverie, still breathing these words, like an invocation of love:

"He will come—he will be here!"

And she turned instinctively, bowing towards the eastern sky—as if desirous to know what the coming day would bring, that now peeped grey over the horizon—and she abandoned herself, with a sense of dread and yet of exultation, to that which was to be.

## CHAPTER VIII

IT was near noontide, and the heat greater and greater. The people were all assembled outside the District Office; but the head of the District had not yet appeared. The scrivener had several times come out upon the threshold and, shading his eyes, looked down the broad highway, with its borders of gnarled willow-trees. Nothing was visible but the glittering pools which yesterday's shower had left—one cart crawling along, and a peasant's white capote fluttering among the trees.

So they waited patiently. The Voyt alone rushed bustling to and fro, restless and fidgety, now looking out upon the road, now urging forward the work of the men who were filling up the hollows in the square before the Office.

"Faster, lads! faster, for God's sake! He will be here ere ye have done the work!"

A voice from the crowd called out: "Beware lest ye be so scared that some accident happen to you!"

"Now, men, stir yourselves! I am here on duty: such jests are untimely."

"Our Voyt, 'tis known, fears God alone!" said one peasant, a man from Rzepki.

The Voyt, now furious, shrieked: "If any man speak one word more, I'll have him thrown in jail!"—And then he ran round to the cemetery that stood upon the height on which the District Office was perched.

It was overshadowed by many an ancient tree, through whose branches the grey church tower was seen; the black arms of the crosses bent over the stone wall, and above the road that led through the village.

Nothing was to be seen as yet. The Voyt left the Soltys along with the people, and went into the Office. Here



someone was continually entering, called in by the scrivener, who took occasion to remind him gently of taxes in arrears, unpaid subscriptions for the court buildings . . . and other things still more important. These reminders were truly very distasteful to each of them: how could they pay in such hard times, and just before the harvest? So they only made him a very deep bow, some even kissing his hand, and some pressing their last *zloty* into the man's outstretched palm. But they all implored him to wait till the harvest, or till next fair.

That scrivener! he was a cunning blade, a wily crafty old fox! How many a way he had of fleecing the people! To some he would make no end of promises, others he wrought upon through fear of the gendarmes; these he got the upper hand of through sheer flattery, and those, by treating them with free and easy friendliness. But he always and somehow got something out of every one of them. He was in need of oats, or he required a few young goslings for the head of the District; or he obtained a promise of some straw ropes for binding sheaves. And, willingly or unwillingly, they promised whatever he wanted. And then—just as they were leaving—he would take those apart whom he knew best, and say to them in friendly guise:

"Look ye, vote for the school; for if ye should oppose it, our head may wax angry, and peradventure cancel your agreement with the Squire as to the forest."

"How's that?" cried Ploshka, in astonishment. "Why, we made the agreement freely on either side."

"Aye, but know ye not?—'But noble with noble is hand in glove; for peasants, never noble has love.'"

Much dismayed, Ploshka left him; and he continued to call the men in, frightening each of them in a different way, but pressing them all to do the same thing.

A good many people were gathered together—more than two hundred—who at first grouped themselves by villages, each with his own acquaintances: men of Lipka with men of Lipka, and so on. But now it was known to be the head of the District's will they should vote about the school, they

began to mingle together, passing from group to group as it suited them. Only the "nobility" of Rzepki held proudly aloof, looking down upon the other peasantry. All the rest had presently mixed together, like lentils in a dish, all over the square, but congregating mostly in the shadow of the churchyard trees, or about the wagons.

But it was round the large tavern that they thronged closest. This stood opposite the District Office, surrounded by a clump of trees, as in a shady grove; and many a one went that way to refresh himself with a glass of beer, after standing so long in the hot glare. The tavern being chock-full, quite a number of groups were lounging about under the trees, discussing the news and attentively watching both the Office and the other side of the house, where the scrivener lived, and where the noise and bustle was greatest.

From time to time, the scrivener's wife thrust her fat face out of a back window, screaming:

"Make haste, Magda! O you sluggard! may you break both your legs!"

The girl was heard every now and then rushing about the rooms, the panes quivering to her tread; a child would squall with shrill vehemence; somewhere behind, the fowls were cackling in great trepidation, and a panting constable was hunting chickens in the corn and down the road.

"Belike they are going to feast the head official," someone remarked.

"They say the scrivener brought in half a cartload of liquor yesterday."

"Then they'll get as drunk as they did last year."

"Oh, they can afford it. Do not the people pay, and is there anyone to watch what their hands grab?" said Matthew: to whom another cried at once:

"Be silent! the gendarmes have come."

"They prowl about like wolves: where they go, and by which ways, who can tell?"

So they stood mute with fear, when the gendarmes drew up in a line before the Office, with a number of people round them: amongst whom were conspicuous the miller,



the Voyt, and—at a little distance—the blacksmith, alert and attentive.

“That miller!—He fawns upon them, like a famished dog!”

“Wherever the gendarmes are seen, look out for the District Official!” Gregory exclaimed, passing over to where Antek, Matthew, Klemba, and Staho were talking together. Then they parted to mix with the people, holding forth and expressing their opinions with much force. They were listened to in silence; sometimes one or another of their hearers would groan and scratch his head with an embarrassed air, or cast a glance at the gendarmes, now drawing closer to one another.

Antek, with his back against the corner of the tavern, spoke curtly, but with conviction, and an air of authority. In another group, Matthew was talking humorously and making many a man laugh at his jests, while in a third crowd, nearer the cemetery, Gregory lectured with much ability, and as if he were reading out of an open book!

But their speeches all tended in one direction: to oppose the head official, to vote against the school, and not to heed those who were always on the side of the officials.

No one else uttered a word, but all nodded assent: even the greatest fools among them knew well that such a school meant nothing but the payment of new taxes for nothing: which no one cared for.

The multitude, however, were restless, shifting uneasily from one foot to the other, coughing and clearing their throats.—They were terribly afraid of opposing the head official and his satellites.

One man looked at another, secretly troubled what to do; and everyone noted carefully what the richest among them seemed to think. As to the miller and the foremost men in the other villages, they appeared to put themselves forward on purpose to be favorably noticed by the gendarmes and the scrivener.

Antek went to speak with them; but the miller said rudely: “Any man but a fool can tell how he should vote!”

and turned to the blacksmith, who was of everybody's opinion, and always gliding about from group to group, guessing shrewdly how matters would turn out. He talked to the scrivener, chatted with the miller, offered Gregory a pinch of snuff—and kept his own counsel meanwhile so well that to the very end no one knew on which side he was.

The majority were meanwhile gradually inclining not to vote for the school. They now dispersed about the square, indifferent to the noonday heat, and were setting to canvass their views still louder and more boldly than before, when the scrivener called from the open window:

"Here, some one of you!"

No one stirred.

"Let someone run over to the Manor for the fish. 'Twas to be brought here in the morning, and we are waiting still.—Come!" he shouted masterfully; "make haste!"

Here a voice uttered the bold words:

"We are not here as your servants!"

"Let him run thither himself! It irks him to drag his paunch about!" At this they laughed, for his belly was indeed as big as a drum.

The scrivener swore. But in a minute, out came the Voyt at the back of the house, who, passing behind the tavern, slipped away to the Manor by the outside of the village.

"He must have been changing the clothes of the babies at Madam Scrivener's, and cleaning them likewise: so he has gone out for a little fresh air."

"Ah, yes; Madam likes not her rooms to be noisome."

"She will soon find other services for him to render her."

"Strange that the Squire is not yet to be seen," they said in some surprise; but the smith returned, with a cunning smile:

"He has too much sense to come."

They looked at him inquiringly.

"For why," the smith explained, "should he have to vote for the school . . . or go to loggerheads with the District



Official? And he will never vote: fancy what he would have to pay! No, he is wise."

"But you—are you with us, Michael, say?" Matthew pressed him, eager to know.

The smith wriggled like a worm trodden upon, but, being in a quandary, grumbled a word or two, and went over to speak to the miller, who had come round to the peasants, and was now talking to old Ploshka very loud, for the rest to hear.

"My advice is: Vote as the officials wish. A school there must be: the worst is better than none. The one you wish for, ye'll not get: 'tis no use knocking your heads against a wall. Won't you vote?—Then they will not ask your leave."

"But," cried a bystander, "what can they do, if we give no money?"

"You are foolish. They'll take it. Will you refuse?—They will sell even your last cow, and send you to prison for mutiny into the bargain. Is that clear?—For," he added, turning to the Lipka folk, "ye have to do now, not with the Squire, but with the head official: a man who is not to be trifled with!—I tell you, do as they bid, and thank God things are no worse!"

Such as held his views here chimed in; and old Ploshka, after musing for some time, said on a sudden:

"Ye say true; and Roch misleads and seduces our folk."

To this, one of the Przylek husbandmen added with emphasis:

"He is with the Manor folk, and therefore stirs us up against the Government."

An outcry arose against him on every side; but he, undaunted, went on as soon as they let him.

"Those," he said, looking sagely around him, "those are fools that help him. If anyone likes this not, let him come forward: I'll call him a fool to his face. Such men know not that it hath been so from all time: the gentry rebel and drive our folk to ruin; but who has to pay, when pay-day comes? Why, we peasants! When the Cossacks are

quartered in your villages, who will get the beatings? who will suffer and be sent to prison? Only we peasants! The gentlefolk will not move a finger for you; they will slink away and leave you in the lurch, the Judases!—and, moreover, they will feast the officials in their manors!”

“Ha! What is the people in their eyes that they should stir for them?” cried one; and another:

“If they could, serfdom would be restored to-morrow!”

“Gregory says,” the former speaker continued, “let them teach in Polish; or, if they will not, let us vote no schools and no money for them.”—Very fine. But ’tis only a labourer who can say to his master: ‘I will not work,’ throw an insult in his face, and yet escape a thrashing by running away. We farmer folk cannot flee, and must needs stay and take the beating. Therefore I say it will come cheaper for you to build the school than to resist the officials. True, they will not teach our language; but they will never make Russians of us for all that: we shall none of us pray to God or speak among ourselves save as we do now, even as our mothers taught us!

“Finally, I repeat: Stand up for your own interests only! Let the nobles tear each other to pieces: ’tis no affair of ours. Let them bite and fight: these are no more our brethren than those. And a plague upon them all!”

Here he was shouted down by the crowd that pressed about him. In vain did the miller and a few others take his part. Those on Gregory’s side came near using their fists, and things were looking very bad, when old Prychek cried: “The gendarmes are listening!”

This silenced them and gave the old man an occasion to hold forth in an angry tone:

“One very true thing he has said: we must look to our own interests!—Be quiet there! You have said your say, let others say theirs!—These fellows bawl and bawl, and think themselves great men!—If shrieking meant thinking, then every loud-mouthed brawler would have a better head than even our priest himself! You laugh at me; but I say to you: how was it that year . . . when our noblemen



rebelled? Remember how they threw dust in our eyes, and swore that as soon as Poland existed, we should have our will . . . our own lands . . . and forests—and everything. And they made promises and speeches, and every other man of us helped them; and what have we of it now?—Ye may hearken to the nobles, if ye be fools; but I am too old a bird to be caught with chaff!”

“Smite him on the mouth, that he may be still!” cried a voice.

He went on nevertheless: “And now I am a noble, as much as any of them all: I have my rights, and none dares lay a finger on me!”

But his voice was drowned in a torrent of jeers that poured down on him from all sides.

“You swine that grunt about your delights, and are happy to have a sty and a full trough!”

“Once fatted, you shall feel the club on your skull, and the knife at your throat!”

“Did not a gendarme flog him at last fair? And yet he prates about no one daring to touch him!”

“A great noble he is, and most free to be eaten by lice!”

“Truly the straw stuffed in his boots could teach as much wisdom as he!”

“He knows not to judge a fowl’s worth, yet he comes here to enlighten us!”

The old man was foaming with rage, but only said:

“Ye scum of the land! . . . that cannot even respect grey hairs!”

“What then? Must a grey mare be respected, for that she is grey?”

They roared with laughter at this; but presently their attention was diverted to the roof of the office, on to which the constable Joseph had climbed, and, holding to a chimney, was gazing into the distance.

“Joseph!” they cried to him in a merry mood. “Shut your mouth, lest something fall into it!” For a flock of pigeons was wheeling above his head. But he only shouted with all his might:

"He is coming . . . coming! Has passed the turning from Krylak!"

The assembly now gathered close round the building, and gazed quietly along the road that as yet lay empty.

The scrivener hastily donned his very best clothes; again the air rang with his wife's outcries, and the clinking of plates, and the rumbling of displaced furniture, and the noise of many feet. In a short time, the Voyt too appeared on the scene: standing on the door-step, red as a beet-root, perspiring, breathless, but adorned with his chain of office. Casting his eyes on the crowd around him, he shouted in fierce tones:

"Silence, men! This Office is not a tavern."

"Come round here, Peter! I'll tell you what!" Klemba cried to him.

"There is no Peter here! I am an official," he answered loftily.

The words were taken up at once and made great fun of, till they shook with laughter; but, all at once, the Voyt cried solemnly:

"Make way there! Way for the head of the District!"

A coach appeared on the road, jolting over the ruts and hollows, and pulling up in front of the office.

The head official raised his hand to his cap, the peasants took their hats off, and silence followed, while the Voyt and the scrivener darted forward to assist him from the coach, and the gendarmes stood erect at attention beside the doorway.

He alighted, divested himself of his white dust-coat, turned round to gaze at the assembled crowd, stroked his blond beard, assumed a severe look, and nodded his head. Then he entered the scrivener's dwelling, into which the latter, bent like a hoop, ushered him.

The coach drove away, and the peasants thronged round the table that had been set up. They thought the meeting was now about to begin. But it was a very long while indeed before the head official showed himself: while from the scrivener's apartments there came the noise of jingling



glasses, and laughter, and certain fragrant scents that made the mouth water.

They were weary both of waiting and of the broiling heat, and many a one tried to slip away to the tavern. But this the Voyt would not have.

"Do not go away!—Whosoever is absent shall be put down for a fine."

This kept them back, but they uttered many an invective, as they looked impatiently towards the scrivener's curtained windows.

"They are ashamed to be seen drinking!"

"Quite right of them: it would only make us more thirsty that we have but our spittle to swallow!"

From the lock-up, in the same building as the Office, now came the constable, dragging by a halter a large calf that resisted with might and main and, making a sudden rush at him, upset the man and set off at a run, tail in air in a cloud of dust.

"Stop thief! Stop thief!" they cried, laughing.

"Oh, the bold rascal, to break prison so, even lifting up his tail against my Lord the Voyt!"

They also aimed a good many jibes at the constable, who was not able to get the calf into the yard without the assistance of all the Soltyses present. They were not yet fully breathed after their hunt, when the Voyt ordered them all to cleanse the lock-up thoroughly; he himself saw that the work was well done, and helped them a good deal, fearing lest the District Official should make a tour of inspection.

"But, Voyt dear! ye'll have to burn incense there, or his nose will tell him who the prisoner was!"

"Have no fear: after a few drams he will scent naught in the world."

And other gibes were thrown at the Voyt, which he only received with clenched teeth and glaring eyes.—At last, however, they had enough of sun, and hunger, and waiting—and could not even jest any longer. So, in spite of the Voyt's objurgations, they all made tracks for the tavern and the trees, Gregory flinging these words at him:

"Ye may cry till nightfall: we are no dogs to follow you to heel!"

Saying this, and glad to be no longer under the gendarmes' inspection, he again went about amongst the people, reminding each man apart in what sense he should give his vote.

"And," he would wind up, "fear ye not: right is on our side. As we vote, so things shall be; and what we will not have, no man can force upon us."

They had, however, not yet begun to stretch themselves in the shade, or to eat a morsel, when each village was called by its Soltys, and the Voyt came roaring:

"Here's the head!—Come quick!—We are to begin now!"

"The smell of good things has wrought upon him," they muttered in a bad temper, walking slowly towards the Office. "We are in no hurry; let him wait!"

Each Soltys stood at the head of his own village; but the Voyt was seated at the table, beside the scrivener's assistant, who whistled to frighten the pigeons, that circled round above the roof in a white fluttering cloud.

One of the gendarmes suddenly stood at attention, and cried: "Silence!" in Russian.

To their disappointment, however, no one came out but the scrivener, holding some papers in his hand, and edging himself to a seat behind the table. The Voyt then rang the bell, and said, majestically:

"Good people! we open the meeting.—Be still there, ye men of Modlitsa!—Our secretary will read you things concerning this school: only hearken ye diligently, that ye may know all about it."

Putting on his spectacles, the scrivener began to read, very slowly and distinctly.

After a short interval of breathless silence, someone exclaimed:

"Why, we understand naught!"

"Read it in our tongue! We cannot make it out!" repeated many voices.



The gendarmes here began to fix a steady glare upon the people.

The scrivener looked very black, but went on with the document, translating it into Polish.

All now were still, listening to each word with the most concentrated attention. The scrivener continued deliberately:

"Whereas it hath been decided to found a school in Lipka, the same being also for the use of Modlitsa, Przylek, Rzepki, and the neighbouring hamlets . . ."

The rescript then pointed out how great a benefit education was; how the Government was night and day only thinking of means to aid the progress and enlightenment of the people, and to defend it from all evil influences . . . and then passed on to reckon how much would be required for the ground, for the building itself, and (yearly) for the teacher: concluding with the estimate that they ought to vote a supplementary rate of twenty kopeks per acre.—He paused, wiped his spectacles, and added as an observation of his own:

"The head of the District has assured me that, if ye vote the rate now, he will allow the building to commence this year, so that next year in autumn your children will go to school."

When he ended thus, no one made any remark. Everyone reflected with heads bent as under the weight of this fresh burden. At last the Voyt said:

"Have ye heard all that our secretary has read to you?"

"We have indeed! We are not deaf!" several voices replied.

"Then whoso is against this plan, let him step forward and say so."

No one, however, was so bold as to put himself forward first, or go beyond glances and nudges.

"Then," the Voyt proposed, "let us vote the rate directly, and go home."

"Very well," the scrivener asked, with solemn formality. "Ye do all unanimously agree to this plan?"

"No! No!" vociferated Gregory, and about a score of others with him.

"We need no such schools! We will not have them! The taxes are heavy enough as it is!—No!" and cries of opposition now resounded on every side, and ever more boldly.

At the sound, the head official came forth and stood in the doorway. At the sight, the tumult died away. Stroking his beard, he said, with much affability:

"Well, good husbandmen, how goes it with you?"

"The better that your Honour asks us!" answered the foremost men, swaying to and fro under the pressure of those behind, pushing forward to hear the District Official. Now he, leaning against the door-post, uttered some sentences in Russian; but their effect was impaired by constant hiccups.

The gendarmes started forward, crying to the people:

"Hats off! Hats off!"

A voice was thereupon heard abusing them roundly: "Get out, ye vermin, and meddle not with our business."

But the head official, though he had spoken very affably, concluded in Polish, and in a tone of command:

"Vote the rate, and at once, for I have no time to spare."

And he looked on them with an ominous scowl. Fear seized upon them; they wavered, and low timorous whispers ran through their ranks.

"Ah, shall we vote?—Say, Ploshka, what are we to do?—Where's Gregory?—The head commands us to vote!—Come, then, brethren, let us do so!"

But the tumult swelled to a storm, when Grzela came forward, and declared fearlessly: "For such a school we'll not vote half a kopek!"

"We will not! No, we will not!" a hundred voices repeated.

At this, the head official knitted his brows.

The Voyt was terror-struck, and the scrivener's spectacles fell from his nose. But Gregory met the great man's glance



without fear, and was about to speak further, when Ploshka, pushing forward, and louting very low, said humbly:

"May it please your Honour the District Official if I speak in our tongue, and think with our own thoughts.—As to voting the school, we are willing; but twenty kopeks an acre seems to us very much. Times are hard just now, and money is short. And that is all."

The head made no reply, and seemed plunged in thought, only nodding his head at times, and rubbing his eyes. Encouraged by these gestures, the Voyt spoke strongly in favour of the school, and those of his party likewise, the miller distinguishing himself amongst them, and scorning the interruptions of Gregory's partisans, until the latter grew angry and shouted: "We are pouring empty vessels into the void!" and availed himself of an opportunity to step forward and ask boldly:

"We would know what kind of school this new one is to be."

"Like all the others!" he said, opening his eyes very wide.

"That is the very sort we do not want. We'd vote even half a rouble an acre for a Polish school, but not a stiver for any other."

"Those schools are good for nothing!" cried one. "My children learned there for three years, and do not know their A B C."

"Be still, good folk, be still!" growled the head.

The sheep were getting lively, and the wolf was biding his time.

"Those infernal talkers! they will talk the people to its ruin!"

And now every man was striving to speak louder than his neighbours, and the din became deafening, each one maintaining his own view. They had broken up into small groups, disputing with one another, and getting ever more and more excited, Gregory's party especially standing up most stubbornly against the school. It was to no purpose that the Voyt, the miller, and the others of that side went

about explaining, beseeching, even threatening awful things that might come to pass: the greater part of the assembly had got quite out of hand, excited to exasperation, and talking themselves hoarse.

The District Official, who sat seemingly indifferent to the hubbub, conferred in whispers with the scrivener, and let them talk their fill; and when he judged they had enough of that senseless noise, he told the Voyt to ring the bell.

"Silence there!" thundered the Soltyses of each village. "Silence! and lend your ears."

Then, before all was quite still, rose the voice of command:

"The school, look ye! has to be built. Obey, then, and do as ye are bidden."

His tone was as hard and stern as could be; but they were no longer afraid, and Klemba answered him back on the spot.

"We force no one to walk on his head: let others likewise allow us to speak in our tongue, as God has given it us!"

"Hold your tongue!" shrieked the Voyt, ringing the bell to no purpose. "Peace, you son of a dog!"

"What I have said, I repeat: in our schools our language must be taught!"

"Karpenko! Ivanoff!" the Voyt cried to the gendarmes who stood in the centre of the throng; but the peasants pressed round them directly, and they heard a whisper: "Let but one of you touch one of us—we are three hundred—ye shall see!"

Then their ranks opened slowly to let them pass, and closed after them, surging round the head official, with the dull angry hum of a furious mob; catching their breaths, cursing low, and one or other of them every now and then uttering such words as these:

"Every creature has its own voice; we alone are forbidden our own!"

"Always commands, and naught except commands! Obey, and pay, and sweep the ground with your hat, you peasant!"



"They'll make us soon ask leave . . . to go behind the barn!"

"So mighty a man, let him command swine to sing as nightingales!" Antek cried. They laughed, and he went on, greatly excited:

"Or bid geese to low like cows! When they do, we'll vote the school!"

"They tax us, we pay; they recruit us, we go; but beware of . . ."

"Hold your peace, Klemba!—His Majesty the Czar himself has decreed in the clearest words that our schools and law courts are to use Polish! Yes, the Czar himself has decreed it: him shall we obey!" Antek vociferated.

"Who are you?" the head official said to him, with eyes intently fixed upon his face.

"Who am I?—It stands there in black and white," Antek replied boldly, pointing to the papers on the table, though he felt his heart throb as he did so. "I am no magpie's dropping!" he added with bravado.

The head spoke to the scrivener, who after a while proclaimed the fact that Antek Boryna, not being yet cleared of a criminal charge, had no right to take any part in the Assembly of the Commune.

Antek flushed angrily, but, before he could utter a word, the District Official cried out to him: "Get him out!" indicating him to the gendarmes with a significant look.

"Boys, never vote this school! Right is on our side: have no fear!" Antek shouted indomitably.

And with slow steps he went out of the village, looking back at the gendarmes following him yet more slowly still, as a wolf might glare at a couple of curs.

But the incident had brought disorder into the meeting again. Each man seemed possessed of a devil—screaming, cursing, quarrelling, threatening—no one knew why or wherefore!

Their invectives bore, not only on the school and Antek, but on indifferent and wholly irrelevant matters—just as if

a sudden madness had seized upon them. Gregory and others of his party strove to calm them, but unavailingly: they were blind and deaf to everything, gobbling one at another furiously, like irritated turkeys in a poultry-yard.

At last, one of the Soltyses, seeing an empty barrel that stood under the eaves of the house, had the idea of beating upon it with his stick so frantically, so madly, and with such loud and hollow bombilation, that it partly brought them to their senses again.

Thereupon the head official, who was beside himself with rage, exclaimed: "Enough of this prating! Silence! Silence, when I speak!—Obey me.—Vote the school."

All were in a moment struck dumb with fear: a cold thrill went through them. They looked at one another, without dreaming of defying the man who stood there, grim and threatening before them, rolling savage eyes over the terrified multitude.

Again he sat down, while the Voyt and his party once more attempted to frighten the peasants into obedience.

"Vote for the school!—We must!"

"Have ye not heard? An ill thing is impending!"

Meanwhile, the scrivener read the list of names, and the cry, "Here! Here!" was heard with incessant reiteration.

This done, the Voyt ordered those who were for the school to pass to the right and raise their hands.

A good many did so, but the bulk of the assembly would not budge.

The head official then, knitting his brows, ordered the votes to be taken by name, "that all might be done with strict justice."

Gregory was dismayed on hearing this order. He was but too sure that the majority would weaken, and not venture to oppose the vote.

The polling took a long time, for the people were very numerous; but the result was given at last:

"Ayes, two hundred; noes, eighty."

Gregory's party raised a great protest.



"We have been cheated!—Vote again!"

"I said, No! and they put my vote down for the school!" one man, soon followed by many others, declared persistently; and the more zealous proposed to tear up the papers and thus annul the voting.

A coach from the Manor then passed by good fortune outside the Office, and the people had to draw back willy-nilly. The District Official, having read the list, handed to him by a manservant, declared solemnly: "It is well; ye shall have a school in Lipka."

No one spoke a word any more; they all stood gazing at him in silence.

He then, after signing a few papers, got into his coach and drove away.

They all bowed to the ground. He took no notice of them, even by a glance; but, having spoken a few words with the gendarmes, turned off to the Manor of Modlitsa by a side road.

Their eyes followed him in silence. At last, one of Gregory's men said:

"That lamb, so meek and mild, can show fangs that bite deeper than a wolf's—aye, and when we least expect it, trample us under his feet!"

"How could they govern at all, unless we were fools and they scared us?"

Gregory breathed hard, looked round, and whispered:

"For to-day, we have lost: it is hard; but the people have not yet learned how to resist."

"And that they will hardly learn, so long as everything can frighten them."

"My God! what a man! He tramples even the laws underfoot."

"Aye, they are for us, not him!"

Here a peasant from Przylek came complaining to Gregory.

"I meant to vote for you; but behold! when he fixed his eyes on me, I could not speak a word, and the scrivener wrote down what he pleased."

"There have been so many abuses that we might well make an appeal."

"Come all to the tavern!" cried Matthew. "May a brimstone thunderbolt smash them all!" Then, turning to the crowd, he shouted:

"Do ye know, my men, that the head has forgotten to tell you one thing?—That ye are a rabble of sheep and curs. Ye will be well paid for your obedience; but such idiots as ye are deserve to be flayed alive—not only fleeced."

They answered him back, some even abusing him roundly; but their attention was then drawn off by a cart with a Jewish driver, and Yanek sitting in it.

Yanek was soon surrounded by a crowd, and Gregory told him what had occurred. Yanek listened, talked to them for a while, and then drove on.

The others repaired to the tavern, where, after a couple of glasses, Matthew roared out:

"I tell you, the Voyt and the miller are to blame for everything!"

"Quite true," Ploshka chimed in; "they were all the time canvassing and pressing and bullying us!"

"And the head official threatened us, just as if he knew all about Roch!" someone faltered.

"If he does not, he is sure to be told. We have informers amongst us!"

"What," Gregory inquired with an uneasy glance, "what has become of those gendarmes?"

"Gone somewhere in the direction of Lipka."

Gregory for a short time lounged about the tavern with the others, but presently he slipped out unnoticed by anyone, making for Lipka by a short cut across the fields.



## CHAPTER IX

ANTEK left the assembly about as willingly as a cat driven away from a bowl of milk. He was even deliberating whether he had not better return, when, perceiving the gendarmes following him, he was struck with an idea. On his way, he broke off a large bough, and set about whittling it into a stick, leaning against a fence, and eyeing the "Brown-Coats," who walked as slowly as they could, but could not help coming up with him very soon.

"Wither away, my ancient?" he asked the elder of them in a tone of mockery.

"On duty, Master Farmer.—Are we bound for the same place?"

"It would please me, but I fancy not."

Looking around, he saw that they were quite alone with him, but still too near the District Office: so he went with them, walking close to the hedge, and well on the look-out for a sudden attack.

The "ancient," cautiously disposed, continued the talk in a friendly tone, complaining bitterly that he had not eaten since early morning.

"The scrivener," Antek replied, "has treated the head official most grandly, so no doubt he had left good things for you, my ancient!—Alas! in the country there are no such dainties to be had—only *kluski* or cabbage!—and what are those things for grand folk like you?" He was jeering on purpose to irritate them. The younger of the two, a stalwart young fellow with flashing eyes, growled under his breath, but the "ancient" made no answer.

Antek, still playing with the men, now stirred his legs so vigorously that they had much ado to keep up with him,

and awkwardly splashed along after him through pools and stumbled into hollows.

The country-side was quite empty and deserted; a blazing sun burned. Here and there a peasant stared after them, or a few children peeped out from shady places: the village dogs alone followed them persistently and with great clamour of barking.

The "ancient" lit a cigarette, and held it between his teeth as he went on talking, lamenting over his lot: no rest either day or night with that everlasting service!

"Indeed? That means it is no easy thing nowadays to squeeze money out of the peasants!"

The "ancient" flung out a curse at him, with a foul reflection on his mother. Antek, who had no mind to bandy insults with them, grasped his stick with a firm clutch, and rejoined, now openly attacking him:

"What I say is the simple truth: your service in the villages only gets you barked at; at most, some poor fellow's last *zloty* may now and then find its way to your pockets!"

The "ancient," though he turned green with spite, and clenched his hand on his sword-hilt, still bore this in silence. It was only when they were just passing the last cabin in the village that he unexpectedly sprang at Antek, crying out to his comrade:

"Seize him!"

The surprise failed, however. Before they could touch him, Antek had sent them both reeling back with a couple of blows. Leaping to one side, he stood, with his back against the cabin, brandishing his stick, showing teeth that gleamed like a wolf's, and uttering bits of sentences, hoarse and incoherent:

"Go your ways. . . . Ye'll never get hold of me! . . . Even four of you would be too few! . . . Dogs! I'll break all your teeth! . . . What would ye? . . . I have done no one any harm. . . . Will ye have a fight?—Very well; but first order a cart to carry your bodies away. . . . Come on, then.—Touch me.—Let me see you try!" he growled; and his stick sang loud in the air. He was in a slaying mood.



Seeing him thus, they both stood transfixed: the man was of such great stature, expanded to the utmost by the towering passion he was in; and his stick hissed and hummed and whirled in his hand with so ominous a sound!—The “ancient” felt that an attack upon him was out of the question, and attempted to turn the whole affair off as a joke.

“Ha! ha! excellent! . . . Trapped! Trapped! A splendid joke we have played off on you!” He burst out laughing, holding both his sides, while they withdrew several steps (overcome, as it were, with the fun of the thing); but, continuing to retire, and now out of danger, he suddenly changed his tone and, shaking his fist, snarled furiously:

“Ye have not seen the last of us, my master: we shall talk with each other once more!”

He snarled back in reply: “May the plague carry you both off first! Why, you are afraid lest *I* should attack *you*; therefore did ye try to turn it into a jest!—And I too shall talk with you . . . but man to man, and alone!” he growled, as he watched them out of sight.

“Those fellows—to set upon me!” he thought. “The fools! They were the hounds, I was the hare!”—He mused. —“Because of what I said at the assembly! Though indeed it could not have been much to his taste.”

He was now near the Manor garden, that lay at some distance beyond the village, and sat down there to rest awhile and compose himself. The Manor was seen through the wooden fence, white upon the background of a larch grove, its open windows staring darkly, like so many grottoes. On the pillared veranda, there were several people sitting: probably taking refreshment, for servants hovered about them, and there was a clinking of crockery. At times the sound of merry laughter was heard.

“They are well off, those folk! Eating, drinking, and caring for nothing at all!” he thought, making a meal of the bread and cheese that Hanka had put in his pocket.

As he ate, his eyes roved over the huge lime-trees which

bordered the road, and were now full of blossoms and humming bees, and the soft steamy fragrance from them filled him with delight. A duck quacked in a neighbouring pond; there, too, frogs croaked drowsily; the thickets around him thrilled to the many voices of living things, and from the fields came the grasshoppers' concert, alternately loud and faint: till, after a time, all these sounds were hushed and silenced, as it were, in the sunshine's hot downpour. Silence reigned; all animated life hid away from the desolating heat—all except the swallows, that were darting and dashing and flashing about evermore.

His eyes ached with the intensity of the heat, and even in the shadow he felt parboiled. The last pools were drying up, and the blast, which blew from the all but ripe cornfields and the parched fallow lands, was like that from an open oven.

Antek, after resting well, walked swiftly towards the neighbouring woods; but, passing out of the shadow and into the light, he felt a quiver pass through him, as if he were entering a furnace of white fire. His capote was off, but his shirt, that clung close to his moist reeking sides, seemed like hot sheet-iron. He took off his boots as well, and went on with naked feet crunching the burning sand.

The stunted little birch-trees that grew here and there gave hardly any shadow yet; the drooping ears of rye bent down over the roadway, and the flowers also hung their heads in the burning glare.

Sultry silence prevailed: no man was visible; no bird, no living creature anywhere in sight. Not a leaf, not a blade of grass trembled. It was as if the Demon of Noontide had swooped down upon the country and, with husky lips, were sucking all the strength out of the swooning earth.

Antek walked on, still more slowly, thinking of the assembly: now furious with anger, now laughing with scorn, now heavy with discouragement.

"What's to be done with such men?—The first gendarme who comes by appals them! . . . If they were commanded to obey a gendarme's boot, they would!—Sheep, silly sheep,



all of them!" he thought, with mixed feelings of bitterness and compassion.

"True, we are all badly off—each one of us wriggling like a tortured eel! And everyone is so wretched, he can hardly breathe: why should he trouble about things that concern him less! Ah, poor people, so benighted, so miserable! They do not so much as know what they need!" And his heart went out to them, afflicted at the thought of their misery.

"Swine find it hard to raise their snouts to the sky—and so do men!" So he thought, sorely troubled, but yet got no profit of his pain, further than the feeling that he himself was in as bad a case as anyone else—perhaps worse.

"Only those can live their lives contentedly who never think!"

He waved his hand with a gesture of despair, and then walked on, plunged in so deep a reverie that he nearly stumbled over a Jew—a rag-picker—sitting at the edge of a cornfield.

"Resting, are ye? Indeed, the heat is terrible," he said, stopping for an instant.

"Heat? We are in a furnace: 'tis a judgment of God!" the Jew ejaculated. Getting up, he passed a strap over his round old shoulders, and, thus harnessed to his wheelbarrow, set about pushing it along with infinite toil. It was chock-full of rags and wooden boxes; above these towered baskets of eggs and a coop full of chickens; and, the road being deep with sand, and the weather unbearably hot, he had to struggle along desperately, and sit down to rest every now and then.

"Nuchim, you'll be late, Sabbath is at hand," he soliloquized, chiding himself with tears. "Push, Nuchim, push on! you're strong as a horse! Now, Nuchim!—One—two—three! . . ." And with a cry of desperation, he would wheel the barrow on for a score of paces, and then stop again.

Antek was for passing him by with a nod, but the Jew called to him earnestly:

"Master Farmer, I pray you! Help me, and I will pay you well. I can no more, in truth I can no more!" And he fell forward against the handbarrow, breathless and as white as a sheet.

Without a word, Antek turned round, threw his capote and boots on to the barrow, seized it by the handle and pushed it forward so lustily that the wheel hummed and the dust flew. The Jew trotted beside him, catching his breath as he went, and chattering by the way to interest his helper.

"Only as far as the wood: the road is good there. 'Tis not far. And I'll give you five whole kopeks!"

"Confound your kopeks! Fool, do I care for your money? But ye Jews think money is everything in the world."

"Be not angry, Master, I'll give you pretty toys for your children.—No?—Then needles, thread, ribbons peradventure?—No?—Then may I offer rolls or scones or caramels . . . or aught else? For I have everything—Or would ye, Master Farmer, buy of me a packet of tobacco? Or may I give you a glass of quite superior vodka? such as I have only for my very good friends—on my conscience, only for my very good friends."

And here a fit of coughing made his eyes almost start from their sockets. . . . Antek went a little more slowly, and the Jew, catching at the barrow, managed to drag himself along.

"We shall have a good harvest," he continued, starting another subject; "the price of rye is falling."

"Aye, and when the crop is scanty, it must bring us in less: either way, it is ill for farmers!"

"But the Lord God has granted us fine weather, and the corn in the ear is dry." He rubbed some in his hands and tasted it.

"Well and good; but the Lord Jesus is hard upon us for the barley crop: it is quite lost."

From topic to topic, they came to talk about the morning's assembly. It appeared that the Jew had special in-



formation on this point. Looking cautiously about him, he said:

"Do ye know? The District Official made a contract as far ago as last winter with a builder about that Lipka school! My son-in-law acted as his agent."

"What, in winter, and before it was voted? What is this ye tell me?"

"Was he to ask anyone for leave? Is he not throughout his District like a Squire on his estate?"

Antek put him a few more questions, which Nuchim answered, giving many curious particulars, and finally saying, with tolerant amenity:

"Things have to be so. The husbandman lives on the land he tills, the tradesman on what he sells, the Squire on his estate, the priest on his parish . . . and the official, on everybody. It must be so, and 'tis well so. All men should get their livelihood, should they not?"

"To my mind, that one man should fleece the others is not well; but that all men should live justly, and as the Lord hath commanded."

"What's to be done? Folk must live as they can."

"Oh, I know the saying: 'Every man peels his own turnip'; but therefore do things go so badly."

The Jew nodded, but kept his own counsel.

They at last got to the wood, where the road was less deep in sand. Antek gave up the barrow, bought a *zloty's* worth of sweets for his children, and, when the Jew wanted to thank him, cried out:

"You are foolish! To help you was but a whim of mine."

And then he started off at a good pace for Lipka. He was now in the cool grateful shadow of the trees, with only a tiny strip of sky overhead, and a thin bright stream of sunshine beneath. The wood—of oak, pine and birch—was old and tall, and the trees were pressed close, with a thick undergrowth at their feet of hazels, aspens, juniper-bushes, and hornbeams, with here and there a few groves

of firs, pushing greedily skywards to get at the sun.

There still were plenty of pools glittering on the road after yesterday's rain; plenty of broken boughs, too, and tree-tops scattered on the ground. In some places, a slender tree had been uprooted, and lay across the way, which was quiet and cool and darksome, and smelling of mould and of mushrooms.

The trees stood motionless, lost, as it were, in the contemplation of heaven; only at rare intervals did they let a few beams slip through, like golden gossamer threads, on to the banks of moss, and the wild strawberries, sprinkled about, and red as clotted blood, amongst the pallid grasses.

Antek was so charmed with the cool and profound tranquillity of the wood that he sat down under a tree, and fell unawares into a doze, from which he only awoke at the sound of a galloping snorting horse. It was the Squire, out for a ride, and he went forward to accost him.

They greeted one another as usual, and in neighbourly fashion.

"Fearfully hot, eh?" said the horseman, soothing his restless mare.

"So it is.—In a week's time, we shall have to go reaping."

"In Modlitsa they are already cutting down the rye."

"The soil is sandy there; but this year they will everywhere be reaping earlier."

The Squire asked him about the meeting at the District Office, and stared to hear what had taken place.

"Did ye actually demand a Polish school?—and so openly, and so firmly?"

"I have said: my tongue tells no false tales."

"But what daring! To demand such a thing in the head official's very presence!—Well, well!"

"It is so written down in the laws, as clear can be; I had the right to demand it."

"But how did the idea come into your head to ask for a Polish school?"

"How? Because I am a Pole—not a German, nor of any other nation."



"But who gave you the idea?" he asked, lowering his voice, and approaching.

"Untaught, children may learn to think aright," he answered evasively.

"Ah," he went on in the same tone, "I see that Roch's work amongst you has borne fruit. . . ."

"Who, together with your Honour's *kinsman*, teaches our folk as he can."

Antek had interrupted the Squire, and, laying stress on the word "*kinsman*," looked keenly on him. The Squire, ill at ease, tried to turn the conversation; but Antek returned to the subject of set purpose, speaking of the peasants' many grievances, and their benighted and friendless condition.

"That's because they will hearken to no one. I know well how the clergy work for their good, and how they urge industry upon them . . . and how it is all lost labour."

"Sermons are no more good for that purpose than a thurible of incense for a dead man!"

"Then what *is* good, pray?—You have, I see, learned not a few things in prison," he retorted. The taunt made Antek's eyes blaze and his face flush; but he answered with calm:

"So I have. And, especially, that the nobility is to blame for the evils we suffer!"

"Foolish prating! What harm did they ever do to you?"

"Harm?—When Poland was free, they cared no whit for the people, only to drive them to work with a whip, and oppress them, while they themselves made merry, and danced the country to ruin: so that we now must build it all over, from the very foundations."

The Squire was a hot-headed man, so he lost his temper:

"You insolent peasant! Let alone the nobles and their doings—care rather to pitchfork your dung—you had better! And keep your tongue between your teeth, and well inside, or there be those that will cut it out for you!"

And, slashing his mare, he went off down the road at a swift gallop.

Antek was not less offended and indignant.

"That race of hounds!" he muttered angrily. "Great gentlemen, forsooth! Blood of a dog! So long as he stood in need of the peasants, he was hail-fellow-well-met with them all! The vermin—himself not worth a roast louse!" Infuriated, he strode along, crushing the toadstools on his path in his rage.

On leaving the wood for the poplar road, he heard a couple of voices that seemed familiar to him, and, peering forward, perceived a britzka covered with dust in the shade of some birches at the edge of the wood, and Yanek, the organist's son, standing with Yagna a few paces off.

He rubbed his eyes, quite sure they must be in fault. They were not. The couple, not twenty paces from him, stood gazing one at the other, with faces wonderfully radiant.

Much surprised, he strained his ears to catch what they were saying; but he could only just hear that they spoke aloud.

She had come out of the forest, and met him driving to the village: a chance meeting, he thought at first. But at that moment he was swept by a wave of suspicion, and a rankling sense of bitterness got hold of him.

"No! It cannot be but they have met by agreement."

Yet once more, scanning the innocent features of the young man, and seeing the saintly serenity that lighted up his face, Antek grew calmer, though he was still unable to explain why Yagna had dressed so carefully to go to the forest, why her azure eyes flashed so brightly, why her crimson lips trembled so, or why she was so visibly flooded with joy. He took note of her, his eyes gleaming like a hungry wolf's, as she, with swelling bosom, bent forward to offer Yanek a small basket of bark, out of which he took strawberries, eating some, and putting some in her mouth.

". . . He is almost a priest, and he wants to play like a baby!"

He whispered the words in a tone of pity, and slipped



away quickly home, for the sun told him the afternoon meal was due.

"That ulcer of mine" (he was alluding to Yagna) "hurts me, but only when I happen to touch it! . . . Oh, how greedily her eyes were fixed on the lad! As if she would have devoured him!—Well, let her! Let her!"

But, do what he would, his "ulcer" gave him excruciating pain.

"She flees me as the plague! . . . This fellow's new sieve for her peg.—Fortunately, she will lose her trouble with Yanek.—Ah!" he said, now more and more wrought up; "some women are of such nature that they will run after any man who only whistles to them."

But, fast as he went, his burning memories went with him. He saw no one, though several men passed by; and he only calmed down at the village, on perceiving Yanek's mother, sitting by a ditch, her youngest son rolling in the sand beside her, and a flock of geese grazing between the poplar-trees.

"You have come pretty far with your geese, Madam," he said, stopping to wipe his face.

"I went out to meet Yanek; he must be here at any minute."

"I just saw him at the skirt of the forest."

"Ah, is he, then, so near?" she ejaculated, starting up and chiding her geese for getting into the rye near the roadside, where they were doing considerable damage.

"His britzka was standing near the crucifix; he was in talk with some woman or other."

"Yes, he must have met an acquaintance and had a chat. Good kind-hearted boy! he cannot even pass by a strange dog without patting it.—And who was she?"

"I could not be quite sure, but fancy she was Yagna." He saw the old dame purse her lips at the name, and added, smiling significantly: "I could not tell, for they were slipping away into the thickets. On account of the heat, no doubt."

"Saints of the Lord! what has come to your mind? Yanek!—to mix with such a one!"

"She's as good as others!" he retorted, suddenly angry. "Better, it may be."

The organist's wife bent over her knitting, and her fingers wagged more quickly.

"What! Yanek, on the very verge of the priesthood, to have anything to do with such a woman!" And then she recalled certain tales she had heard about priests, and dug a knitting-needle into her hair in perplexity, and resolved to see into this and inquire. . . . But Antek had gone; and now there came a great cloud of dust upon the road; and two minutes later Yanek was embracing her with the tenderest affection, and crying out from his heart:

"O my dear, my darling mother!"

"Saints of the Lord!—Let go, you young giant, let go: you're choking me!" But when he had let go, she fell herself to hugging and kissing, and gloating over him with eager eyes.

"Poor little mite! How thin they have made you! How pale, poor son of mine! and how wretched-looking!"

"One does not grow fat on broth of holy water!" he answered, laughing, and tossing his little brother up in the air, till he crowed with delight.

"Fear nothing; we'll stuff you and puff you out in no time," she said, stroking his cheeks with affection.

"Well, let us drive on, Mother dear, and we shall be sooner home."

"Ah, those geese! Lord, Lord! In the rye again!"

He ran to drive them off, for they were plucking at the rye-stalks and devouring the grain at will. Then he placed his brother in the cart, and walked on himself along the middle of the road.

"Look there!" his mother cried; "how that brat has smeared his face!" She pointed to the boy on the britzka.

"Yes, he has made free with my strawberries. Eat away, eat away!—I met Yagna coming out of the wood with them, and she gave me some." He coloured bashfully.



"Boryna was just telling me he had met you both. . . ."

"I did not see him; he must have passed at some distance."

"Child, folk in a village can see things through walls—even things that have not taken place!" She laid stress on the words, looking down on her twinkling knitting-needles.

Yanek had apparently not caught her meaning. Seeing a flight of doves sweeping low above the rye, he aimed a stone at one of them, saying merrily:

"They are the priest's: anyone can tell that, so fat they are!"

"Be still, Yanek! Someone else might hear you!" she gently rebuked him, though her thoughts already saw him a parish priest, and herself spending her old age by his side, and living the rest of her years in peace and happiness.

"And when is Felix coming for the vacation?"

"Why, Mother, know ye not? He is in jail."

"Saints of the Lord! In jail! What was the misdeed?—And I always said and foretold he would come to a bad end!—Such a scapegrace!—Had he become a scrivener of low degree—that would have sufficed him—quite; but the miller wanted him to be a doctor, forsooth! . . . And they were so stuck up, so proud of their darling! Now he is in jail—and a pretty comfort to them!" she said, trembling all over with malevolent satisfaction.

"But, Mother, it is not that at all: he is in the Warsaw Citadel."

"In the Citadel? Then" (she lowered her voice) "it is some political misdeed!"

Yanek either could not or would not tell her any more, and she went on, in a faltering voice:

"My dear child, remember never to have aught to do with any such affairs."

"No! In our seminary, anyone who so much as speaks of them is expelled."

"You see? They would expel you, and you would never be a priest, and I—I should die of shame and sorrow! O God! have mercy upon us!"

"My dear mother, have no fear for me."

"And you are aware how hard we work and strive for the bettering of your lot; what trouble we have—so many of us, and our gains always growing less; and how, were it not for the bit of land we have, our priest would drive us to die of starvation. Aye, he now settles matters directly with the peasants, both for weddings and for funerals: who ever heard of such a thing! He says Father takes too much from the peasants—and he becomes their benefactor at other folk's expense!"

"But," Yanek faltered here, "Father really did take too much!"

"What! will ye rise up in judgment on your own father?—Even were this true, for whom is he greedy? For himself? No: for you all; for you and your schooling!" She felt deeply hurt.

Yanek was going to ask her forgiveness, but he just then heard a bell tinkle on the other side of the pond, and cried:

"Hark, Mother! it must be the priest taking the Holy Viaticum to some sick man!"

"He is more likely to be ringing to prevent the bees from flying away; they are probably swarming in his garden now. He is more interested in his bees and his bull than in the church."

They were just passing the churchyard, when suddenly they heard a roaring hum, and Yanek had but just time to call out to the driver:

"Bees are coming!—Hold the horses still, or they'll bolt."

A huge swarm was flying with a loud drone about the church square, rising up like a sonorously purring cloud, and wheeling about in search of a good place to settle upon; at times sweeping low and floating amongst the trees. Behind it ran the priest, clad only in shirt and breeches, bare-headed, out of breath, and continually sprinkling the bees with water from an aspergill. Near him came Ambrose, creeping along in the shadow of the bushes, ringing and shouting with all his might. They went twice round the square without slackening their speed; for the bees, flying ever lower, seemed to want to alight on one of the cottages,



from which the frightened children were already making their escape; but then, rising a little higher, they made straight for Yanek's britzka. His mother, with a shriek, and pulling her petticoat over her head, ran to crouch down in the nearest ditch; the geese waddled away; the horses would have bolted, had not the driver covered their eyes with cloths. But Yanek stood quietly, with uplifted head, while the swarm swirled on above him, and passed him towards the belfry.

"Water, quick, before they are off again!" bellowed the priest, rushing after, and, coming up with them, sprinkled them with so copious a shower that their damp wings allowed them to go no farther, and they began to settle on the belfry window.

"Ambrose! the ladder and the sieve now!—Hurry, else they are away again!—Stir your leg and hurry up!—How do you do, Yanek? Get me some live coals in a thurible: we shall have to quiet them with incense!" he cried in great excitement, incessantly sprinkling the swarm as it was settling. Before he could have said a "Hail Mary," the ladder was there, and Ambrose tinkling, and Yanek sending up clouds of aromatic smoke as from a chimney; and meanwhile the priest climbed up and, bending over the swarm, groped amongst the bees to find their queen.

"Ha! here she is! God be praised; they will not flee any farther now!—But they are dispersing: Yanek! smoke them from beneath!" he cried, taking the bees up in his bare hands and pouring them into the big sieve, the swarm being an exceedingly large one, talking to them all the while, and not in the least afraid, although they came settling on his head and crawling over his face.

"Take heed! they are getting excited, and may sting," he said, warning the others, as he came down, surrounded by a vast cloud that was eddying on all sides of him, and buzzing and humming. On reaching the ground, he raised up the sieve as carefully and as solemnly as though it had been a Monstrance. Yanek, swinging the thurible, accompanied him; Ambrose followed, now ringing, now sprinkling

the bees. And thus they went in procession to the priest's apiary, behind his house, where stood in a separate enclosure some scores of hives, all humming as loud as if each of them were about to swarm.

While the priest was getting his bees into their new hive, Yanek, now very tired and hungry, slipped away quietly home.

They all rejoiced exceedingly to see him, and the noise and fuss made over him cannot be described. When the first outburst was over, they made him sit down to table, bringing him all sorts of good things, enticing and pressing and teasing him to eat, till the whole house echoed to the din and bustle, all wanting to be by the lad's side or doing something for him. In the midst of this hubbub, in dropped Gregory, the Voyt's brother, to ask them anxiously if they had seen Roch anywhere. But they had not.

"Nowhere can I find him," he said in distress, and, without staying to talk, went on to another cabin to seek for him. Scarcely had he left them, when the priest sent for Yanek. He lingered and delayed going as long as he could, but of course had to go at last.

His Reverence, who was sitting on the porch, embraced him like a father, and, making him sit down by his side, said with great affability:

"I am glad you have come: we shall say our breviary together.—But do ye know how many swarms of bees I have this year? Fifteen! And as vigorous as any of the old ones; some have already filled a quarter of the hive with honey. And I had more swarms; but I had told Ambrose to watch for the swarming, and he fell asleep, the block-head! and where are the bees now?—In the woods and the forests!—And then the miller stole one from me; he did, I say! They flew on to a pear-tree of his, and he claimed them for his own, and would not hear of returning them. Sore about the bull, he is, and that's his revenge. . . . The robber!—What, have you heard about Felix? . . . Ah! these wretches, they sting like wasps!" he broke off all at



once, brushing away with his handkerchief the flies that came settling on his bald crown.

"All I know is, he's in the citadel."

"If that were all! . . . And I warn him so! . . . The donkey would not hearken to me; and now he's in a pretty fix. . . . The old father is a loud-mouthed boor; but I'm sorry for Felix; a clever young rogue, and with his Latin at his fingers' ends, as well as any bishop! . . . What is that saying? ah, 'Touch not what's not allowed, and keep yourself from things forbidden' . . . and: 'A docile calf thrives as though it sucked two mothers.' Aye . . . aye . . ." he continued his voice growing feebler, as he went on brushing the flies away. "Recollect that, Jasio, recollect it." His head fell back, and he sank deep into his vast arm-chair. But as Yanek got up to leave, he opened his eyes and murmured: "Those bees have tired me out!—Come and say the breviary with me of an evening. . . . And take heed not to be too familiar with the peasants. Note this: 'He that mixes with chaff will be eaten by swine!' Eaten, I tell you—and there's an end."—With these words he threw a handkerchief over his face, and was asleep in the twinkling of an eye.

What the priest had said, Yanek's father thought, no doubt; for, when the farm-servant came home with the horses from the pastures, and Yanek vaulted upon one of them, the old man cried:

"Get down this instant! It is unseemly for a clergyman to ride bare-backed, or to keep company with herdsmen!"

Dearly as he would have loved a ride, he nevertheless alighted meekly and, twilight having fallen now, went into the garden to say his evening prayers. But he could not keep his mind on them. There was a girl, somewhere about, trilling a song; some women were gossiping in a neighbouring orchard, and every word came wafted over the dewy grass to him; children shouted as they bathed in the pond; in another direction, the sound of laughter struck his ears; and then came the lowing of the cows, and the metallic

cackle of the priest's guinea-fowls pierced the air, and the whole place was full of sounds of every kind, and like a hive of humming bees. All this put him out; and when he had at last collected himself, and, kneeling down at the edge of a rye-field, raised his eyes to the starry heaven, and his soul to the Infinite beyond it, he heard such a sudden din of piercing shrieks and howls and curses that he ran back to the house, not a little alarmed and shaken, to ask his mother (who had just come to call him in for supper) what the matter was, and whether the people there were fighting in earnest.

"Oh, 'tis only Joseph Vahnik, back from the police office a little in his cups, and he's fighting his wife. The woman had long stood in great need of a good drubbing. Do not trouble, she will take no harm."

"But she screeches as if she were being skinned alive!"

"That's her way: if he had taken a stick to her, she'd have been quiet enough. And she'll get even with him tomorrow, she will!—Come, dearest, or supper will be cold."

He went to bed, utterly worn out, and having scarcely touched any food. But as soon as the sun rose next morning, he was on his legs: going about the fields, bringing clover to the horses, teasing the priest's turkeys till they gobbled at him indignantly, making friends with the dogs, that tried to fawn on him till they well-nigh broke their chains; scattering grain to the pigeons, helping his youngest brother to drive the cattle, and Michael to chop wood; looking whether the pears in the orchard were ripe yet; frolicking with the colt, going everywhere and greeting everything he saw with eyes of love, as friends and brothers—even the flower-dight hollyhocks, the little pigs basking in the sun, the very weeds and nettles themselves! And his mother, following his gambols with loving looks, murmured, smiling fondly on the lad:

"He's out of his wits—clean out of his wits!"

And so he wandered about, radiant as that July day: smiling, sunny, full of warmth, and embracing the whole world with intense affection . . . until, the Mass-bell be-



ginning to tinkle, he quitted all to hasten away to church.

It was a Votive Mass, and Yanek walked out of the sacristy in front of the priest, in a new surplice, freshly adorned with red ribbons. The organ pealed forth, and from the choir there came a big bass voice which made the flames of the altar-lights tremble. Quite a number of worshippers were kneeling round the altar, when the service began.

Yanek, though serving Mass and praying fervently between his responses and the acts of his ministry, could not help noticing Yagna and her gleaming dark-blue eyes, fixed upon him, and the lurking smile on her parted crimson lips.

After church, the priest took him to his house directly and set him amanuensis work to do for him till noon, when he was free to visit his acquaintances in the village.

He went first to see the Klembas, his nearest neighbours, but found none of them at home. Only, looking through the passage open at either end, he saw that something moved in a corner, and heard a husky voice:

"Here I am . . . I, Agata!" She raised herself up, and lifted her hands in astonishment. "Lord! 'tis Master Yanek!"

"Pray you, do not rise! . . . What, are ye unwell?" he asked her kindly, and, seating himself on a stump that he brought in, looked into her face, which he could scarcely recognize, so worn and wasted it was.

"I am waiting upon the Lord and expecting His mercy." Her voice had a strangely solemn sound.

"What is it that ails you?"

"Naught. But Death is growing ripe within me for the harvest. The Klembas have only taken me in here that I might die amongst them: so here I am—praying and awaiting the end . . . waiting for Dame Crossbones to knock and say: 'Come away with me, you weary soul!'"

"But wherefore are you not lying within—in the cabin?"

"Ah, I would not be in the way till my time comes. As it is, they had to take their calf hence to make room for me. . . . But they have promised to lay me in their dwelling-

room for my last hours—on a bed, beneath the Holy Images, and with the Taper of the Dying lit in my hand! . . . And to bring the priest, and dress me in my best clothes, and give me a real goodwife's funeral! Yea, and I have paid for everything, and they are honest folk: perhaps they will not play false with a poor lone old woman.—I shall not trouble them long; and they promised me this in the presence of witnesses—of witnesses!”

“But are you not weary of lying here alone?”—His voice sounded tearful and unsteady.

“Master Yanek, I am very well off indeed here. Through these doorways, I can see many a thing: folk that go along the road, folk talking one to another; some look in, some even have a few kind words for me: I might just as well be going about the village. And when they have all gone to their work, I can see the fowls scratching in the rubbish-heaps; and then the sparrows hop into the passage, or the sun looks in for a little ere he sets, or some naughty boy flings a clod my way; and so the day is gone by before I know it. . . . And . . . in the night . . . they come to me—oh, many a one! . . .”

“They? Who, ah! who is't that comes?” He bent close, and peered into her seemingly sightless eyes.

“My own folk, who died long ago: kinsfolk and acquaintances.—I tell you true, young master: they do come!—Once, too,” she whispered with a smile of ineffable rapture, “once the Virgin Mother herself came and said to me tenderly: ‘Lie there, Agata, the Lord Jesus will reward you.’ It was she of Chenstohova: I knew her at once by her crown and her mantle, all covered with gold and coral beads. And she stroked my hair and said: ‘Be not afraid, O lone one; you shall be a foremost dame in the court of Heaven, a lady of high degree.’”

Thus spoke the old woman, chirping feebly, like a bird that is dropping off to sleep; while Yanek, bending over her, looked and listened; as one who, gazing into abysmal depths, hears something hidden that bubbles and gurgles, and sees the glimmer of a mystery that is going on, beyond



the ken of the human mind! He felt terror-stricken, yet could not tear himself away from that rag of humanity, that withered ear of corn, that life which, trembling like a ray that goes out in the darkness, was yet dreaming of its forthcoming renewal and splendour! Never yet had he beheld so near as this the inexorable destiny of man, and he was naturally appalled on realizing it. His heart was filled with mourning, and tears welled up from his eyes; he was bowed down to the earth with deep commiseration, and a fervent supplication burst convulsively from his lips.

Old Agata roused herself, lifted up her head, and cried ecstatically:

"O Yanek! O, most holy youth! Dear priest, beloved of my heart!"

He remained for a long time afterwards, standing propped against a wall, taking in the warmth of the sun, and feasting his eyes on the bright day, and the life he saw seething round him.

Did it matter, after all, if hard by him a human soul were struggling in the grip of death?

The sun shone all the same, the cornfields rustled; far, far above, the white clouds sailed past; children played on the roads; on the boughs, ripe apples glowed crimson; hammers beat upon the smithy anvil; they were getting ready a wagon, and tempering a sickle for the coming harvest; the air was redolent of fresh-baked bread; women were chatting together, kerchiefs moved along the hedges and fields and enclosures: humanity went on its way, as usual, as everlastingly, swarming, bustling, full of cares and little schemes, no one so much as wondering who would be first to fall into the abyss!

And so Yanek soon shook off his sadness, and went on to the village.

He stayed a little with Matthew, who was now raising the walls of Staho's hut to a good height; had a talk with Ploshkova, busy bleaching her linen; paid a visit to Yuzka, who was still in bed; lent an ear to the complaints of the Voyt's wife; looked how the smith at his forge was harden-

ing scythes and putting a jagged edge to reaping-hooks; and he looked also into the gardens where women and lasses were at work: everyone was glad to see him, hailed him as a friend, and looked on him with no little pride—a child of Lipka—one of them!

Dominikova's was the last hut he visited. She was sitting outside, spinning, and he wondered how she could spin with a bandage over her eyes.

"My fingers tell me if the thread is fine or thick," she said; and, greatly pleased that he had come, called Yagna, who was doing something about the yard.

She came at once, scantily attired in only smock and petticoat; but on seeing Yanek, she hastily put up her hands and ran into the cabin, as red as a cherry.

"Yagna, bring us milk: Master Yanek will surely take some refreshment."

She brought in a full milking-pail, and a mug to drink from. She had covered herself with a shawl, but was still extremely confused. As she poured the milk out with downcast eyes, her hands shook, and she turned pale and red by turns.

All the time he was there, she said not one single word; but, accompanying him to the gate when he went away, she gazed after him till he was out of sight.

There was in him something that attracted her irresistibly, and stirred her up with such power that, in order not to follow him, she flew to the orchard, caught hold of a tree, and embraced it with all her might, hugging it in both arms. There she stood, breathless, almost beside herself, cloaked and hidden, as it were, by the apple-covered branches that bowed down over her, with eyelids half closed, and a faint smile of happiness on her lips, though she also felt a vague dread, and a fearful yet pleasant sense of agitation: something like what she had experienced when looking at him through the window, that night in spring.

She too attracted him, though he was not aware of any attraction. He would now and then look in at her cabin for a short time, feeling an unaccountable gladness at the



visit; and, seeing her daily in church, always on her knees during the whole of Mass, and seeming to be in a state of fervent, even ecstatic prayer, he could not witness this without a pleasing emotion. One day he spoke to his mother of that ardent piety of hers.

"Oh, if anyone stands in need of prayer and pardon, she does!" was the reply.

Now Yanek's soul was as pure a white as the whitest flower in the world, and so he failed to catch the real meaning of those words. As, moreover, she used to frequent their house, where everybody liked her, and he saw her piety besides to be so great, he really had no suspicion of what she was. Only he thought it a curious thing that she had not come once since his return.

His mother answered: "I have just sent for her; there is much ironing to be done."

And presently she came, but so finely dressed that he wondered.

"What? are ye off to a wedding?"

One of the girls here cried out: "Rather she has received an offer of marriage."

"Let them but dare! I should soon send them flying!" she replied with a laugh, blushing like a rose, for every eye was upon her.

Yanek's mother set her to iron at once; his sisters joined her, and Yanek went with them. In a short time they were all very merry, roaring with laughter over the merest trifles, and finally the old dame had to rebuke them.

"Be quiet, ye magpies!—Yanek, better go into the garden. 'Tis not fitting you should sit grinning here."

So he had to go out, according to his wont, into the fields away beyond the village, or even as far as the boundaries of Lipka, where he would sit reading or meditating.

Yagna knew well those haunts of his, and where to find him, if only with the mind's eye; she was for ever flying round him, like a moth round a candle, and could not help herself; for she was driven towards him, and now followed her impulse without resistance, giving way with all her

heart and soul to that gentle force, which like the rush of a foaming current impelled her onward; she never even wondered on what shores it would land her, nor how it all would end.

Whether she laid herself down to rest late in the night, or rose up at early dawn, she was continually repeating with every heart-beat:

"I shall see him—see him—see him once again!"

She was often kneeling before the altar, when the priest came out to say Mass; the organ burst forth with soul-stirring strains, the incense-smoke poured out of the thuribles, and whispered prayers went up to the throne of God; but she, with eyes full of worship, gazed only on Yanek, clad in white, slender, fair to behold, moving with joined hands amidst the fragrant vapours and the rainbow hues that streamed down from the stained-glass windows. He seemed to her like a real angel, stepping out of a picture-frame, and gliding towards her with a sweet smile. And then all Heaven would enter her soul; she would fall prone in the dust, kissing the place where his feet had passed, and, carried away by the force of her passionate emotions, would join with the others to sing the hymn: "Holy, Holy, Holy!" in a delirium of purely human bliss.

Sometimes Mass was over, and the people had gone home, and Ambrose came jingling his keys to close the church, while she was yet there, on her knees, gazing at the spot, now empty, where Yanek had been—plunged in a hallowed calm, an intoxicating joy, intensified even to pain—shedding big tears that flowed down clear as crystal.

Now was every day for her like a day of solemn festival, a great day of indulgence, with the never-ceasing joy of adoration ever thrilling her soul; and when she looked out upon the country-side, the ripe ears of corn, the sun-baked soil, the orchards bending under their burden of fruit, the far-away forests, the passing clouds, and that grand sun, like the Sacred Host, rising up over the world—all these, with one accord, sang together in her soul one and the same hymn, which reached to Heaven: "Holy, Holy, Holy!"



"At a time like this," she thought, "how strong one feels! One could wrestle with God—master death—even struggle against one's fate! To one in such a pass, life is for ever a joy; even the merest worm is beloved by him! . . . Every morning he kneels to thank the Lord, every night he blesses the day gone by: he willingly would give away all he has, for he would yet remain rich; and with each of those marvellous days, his power of loving increases!

"And how his soul rises up—up—far above all the worlds! And how he looks on the stars as on things close by! how boldly he stretches out his hand to Heaven and the day of bliss everlasting, seeing clearly that there is naught to bound his power of loving, and that naught can turn it aside!"

Meanwhile the days glided by as usual, those days of tedious preparation for the harvest. And she was bustling about and working hard, but as full of song as any lark; unweariedly joyful, blossoming all over with gladness, like a rose-bush or an exuberant hollyhock; or rather like some flower from the garden of Paradise—so winsome to see, so radiantly alluring with those wonderful eyes of hers, so perpetually wreathed with beaming smiles! Even the glances of aged men followed her with delight, and young swains again came flocking about her cabin, sighing with love. But she rejected every one of them.

"Take root here, if you will; you'll profit nothing," she said mockingly to each.

"We are all scorned by her! She is as haughty as any Manor lady," they complained to Matthew. And he only sighed bitterly: he himself, had he any greater privilege than to talk at dusk with her mother, and eye Yagna as she hurried about the cabin, and listen to the songs she sang? He looked and listened, and each time went home in a surlier mood, now more and more often repairing to the tavern, and on his return thence discharging his bitterness on everyone around him. Especially on Teresa, whom he pained so much that life was a burden to her; so much that, meeting Yagna one day, she could not forbear from a

manifestation of spite—turning her back on her and spitting!

But Yagna, walking by with far-away looks, passed on without even seeing her.

Teresa, in a fury, said to the girls that were by, washing at the mill-pond:

"See ye how she stalks past—never looking at anyone, either by day or by night?"

"And," cried another, "arrayed as if it were the local feast to-day!"

"Daily she sits combing her hair till noon!"

"She's always buying ribbons and head-gear!" they chimed in, full of hate. Since some time, whenever she appeared in the village, she was followed everywhere by the women's piercing looks—sharp as cats' claws, stinging as a viper's fangs. And on every occasion they would find something to say against her. The goodwives whispered in Ploshka's enclosure, as she passed:

"It is unbearable, the way she sets herself above us all."

"And dresses like a Manor Lady: whence can the money come?"

"Has she not great favour with the Voyt?"

"Antek also, they say, is very open-handed with her."

But here Yagustynka interfered. "Oh, no, Antek cares no more for her than a dog for a fifth leg! 'Tis someone else she has taken up with now!" And she smiled with such a knowing air that they all pestered her to know who this was. She would not, and told them:

"I am no scandalmonger! Ye have eyes: find out for yourselves!"

And from that time, a hundred pair of eyes spied all Yagna's doings still more closely than ever. So many hounds in pursuit of one hare!

Yagna, thus constantly watched by prying eyes, went her way quite unconscious; nor would she have cared in any case, having the bliss of seeing her Yanek daily, and losing her whole being in his eyes.

Almost every day, she would look in at the organist's,



always when Yanek was at home. Sometimes he happened to sit by her side, and she knew that his eyes were upon her; and then her face glowed, all on fire, her feet trembled and her heart would beat like a hammer. At other times, when he was giving his sisters lessons in the next room, she would listen, holding her breath, and so extremely attentive to the sweet sounds of his voice that the old dame once asked her why she gave ear so eagerly.

"Because Master Yanek teaches in such learned wise that I cannot understand anything at all!"

"And are ye so fain to do so?" she replied with a smile of pity. "My son has learned in no mean school!" she added with pride, and continued expatiating on her Yanek for some time. She was fond of Yagna, and liked her to come; the girl was handy at every sort of work, and besides very often brought something—pears, wild strawberries, whortleberries, sometimes even a pat of fresh butter.

Yagna listened with eager attention to all she said; but when Yanek left the house, she would presently hurry away—to her mother's, she said. She loved to gaze on him from a distance; and at times, too, hidden in the rye or behind a tree, she would gloat over him for a long time, and with such tender emotion that the tears would fall in spite of her.

But her joy was greatest in the short warm clear summer nights. As soon as her mother was asleep, she carried her bedding out into the orchard, where, lying on her back, she looked up at the stars scintillating through the tree-tops, and dreamed sweetly of the "world without end." The sultry night-winds swept over her face and the stars looked down into her wide-open eyes; the voices out of the fragrant darkness, the breathless whispers of the leaves, the broken rustling of the creatures slumbering around—feeble sighs and dull stifled calls and timid chuckling sounds—melted within her into a weird music, penetrating her with a hot thrill that made her catch her breath, and quiver, and fall down, rolling on the cool dewy sward on which she lay like a fruit fallen from the tree. There she would remain, prone and powerless, in the clutch of the almighty force of

Nature, as did the ripening fields, the fruit-burdened branches, the broad yellow wheat-lands, ready for the sickle, the birds, the blasts, or for any fate that awaited them, indifferently expecting all!

Thus did Yagna spend the short warm clear nights and the burning days of July: they passed by her like a delightful dream, repeated again and again, and always more desirable.

And she moved about, too, as in a dream, scarce knowing whether it was day or night.

Dominikova noted that something unusual was taking place in Yagna, but she knew not what: only she was rejoiced at her unexpected and most fervent piety, and would often say:

"Yagna, I tell you: whoso seeks God, to him doth God come!"

And Yagna would then smile a quiet humble smile of expectant happiness, but said nothing.

And one day, quite unawares, she came upon Yanek, sitting by the mound that was the village landmark, book in hand. She could not take to flight, so stood there stock-still, confused and blushing deeply.

"Why, what are you doing here?" he said.

She stammered something, fearing lest he had guessed how matters stood with her.

"Sit down; I can see you are hot and tired."

As she hesitated whether to comply, he took her by the hand and seated her by his side; she, with a quick motion, hiding her bare feet under her skirt.

Nor was Yanek at his ease; he seemed embarrassed and troubled, and looked about him in perplexity.

No one was near. The roofs and orchards of Lipka rose like far-away islands out of a sea of corn, which rolled its waves in the breeze; there was a warm scent of wild thyme mingled with that of the rye. A bird was sailing high above their heads.

To break the awkward silence, he said: "It is terribly hot."



"And it was pretty hot too yesterday," she replied, in a voice so husky with joy and fear that she could hardly get the words out.

"Reaping will begin soon."

"Aye, it will," she assented, her eyes glued to his face.

He smiled and, attempting a free and easy tone, said to her:

"Why, Yagna, you are growing prettier every day!"

"I pretty? No, indeed!" she faltered, turning very red, while her dark-blue eyes shot flames, and a smile of secret delight trembled on her lips.

"But tell me true, Yagna, do ye not mean to marry again?"

"Never! Am I not happy, single as I am?"

"And is there no one for whom ye care at all?" he asked, growing bolder.

"No one, no one!" She shook her head, fixing full upon him her dreamy eyes that told of blissful thoughts. He bent forward, and looked into their azure depths. In her glance there could be read a prayer, full of sweet and most profound trust—like the fervent outcry of an adoring heart at the most sacred instant of the Mass. And her soul stirred within her, as a sunbeam passing over the fields, as a bird winging its way, singing far above the earth.

On a sudden he shrank back, strangely perturbed, rubbed his eyes, and rose to his feet.

"I must be going home." He nodded farewell to her, and set off towards the village through the fields, opening his book to read as he went. His eyes happening to wander off it, he looked round, and stopped short.

Yagna was following, only a few paces behind him!

"This," she said, timidly excusing herself, "is the shortest way home for me too."

"Then let us walk abreast," he answered, gruffly, not much pleased at having her company; and on he went, reading the book to himself half aloud.

"What does it tell of?" she inquired, with a glance at the open pages.

"I'll read you some, if you wish."

There was a spreading tree not far off; so he sat down in its shade to read, while Yagna, squatting down and facing him, her hand propping her chin, listened very eagerly, drinking in all his being with greedy eyes.

"How do you like this?" he asked after a while, raising his head. She blushed, looked away, and blurted out bashfully:

"Can I tell?—It is not a story about kings, is it?"

He looked annoyed and read on, but slowly and distinctly this time, laying stress upon every word. He read about fields and cornlands . . . about a manor that stood in a grove of birches . . . about the son of a Squire who came home . . . and a damsel who sat in a garden with the children! And all that was set down in verse, exactly as in the books of pious canticles, and they sounded like a hymn given out by a priest from the pulpit. And she felt a wish to sigh and cross herself and shed tears, the words impressed her so.

But the place where they were sitting was fearfully hot. All around them stood the rye, spoiled by tangles of corn-flowers and vetches and morning-glory flowers, forming a dense wall, through which no breath of air could pass to cool them. The silence was broken only by the rustling sound of the dangling ears of rye, by the chirping of sparrows in the boughs, and the drone of some passing bee. Yanek's voice sounded very sweet and melodious; but Yagna, though her eyes were fastened upon him, as upon a most beautiful picture, and her ears did not miss one word he said, yet could not help nodding from time to time, for she felt so drowsy she had much ado to keep awake.

Fortunately he left off reading then, looking her straight in the eyes.

"Say, is it not truly beautiful?"

"Aye, very beautiful; very like a sermon!"

His eyes flashed and his cheeks flamed, as he held forth



to her about the poem, and quoted many a passage, describing the fields and forests. But she broke in:

"Why, every infant knows that trees grow in the woods, that water flows in the rivers, and that men sow the fields; wherefore, then, put such things in print?"

Yanek started, astonished and displeased.

"I," she went on to say, "care only for tales of kings, of dragons, of spectres—tales which make one's flesh creep to hear them, and the heart within one burn like a live coal. . . . Such tales Roch tells us sometimes: I could listen to him all day, all night!—Have ye any books on such matters?"

"Who would read them? Mere trash, mere fables!" he ejaculated, scornfully, and very much put out.

"Fables? Why, Roch has read them to us: they are in print!"

"Then he read you falsehoods and senseless things!"

"What, are all those marvellous tales only falsehoods and made-up stories?"

"Nothing more!"

"And those about the noonday phantoms too? And those about the dragons?" she asked, more and more disappointed.

He was losing patience. "I tell you, all that is mere falsehood!" he said.

"But is all false too?—About the Lord Jesus, journeying with Saint Peter?"

He had no time to answer her; for suddenly, as if risen out of the ground, Kozlova appeared, standing in front of them and looking on the pair with a wicked smile.

"Master Yanek," she said in soft tones, "they are seeking you throughout Lipka."

"What can the matter be?"

"Three carts, full of gendarmes, have come to the village."

He started up, greatly upset, and made off as fast as was seemly.

Yagna too returned to the village in deep trouble, Kozlova walking by her side.

"I fear I have interrupted you two . . . in your prayers!" she hissed.

"By no means. He was reading to me from a book with certain tales done into verse."

"Oh. I fancied something very different indeed. His mother had begged me to seek him. . . . Coming this way, I look around: there is no one. . . . Then I think of giving a look under this pear-tree . . . and behold, there are my turtle-doves, cooing one to another.—'Tis a very convenient spot . . . quite out of sight!—Aye, aye!"

Yagna broke away from her in a rage, screaming: "May your filthy tongue be struck dumb for ever!"

And Kozlova cried after her: "And ye'll always have someone to shrive you!"



## CHAPTER X

ON entering the village, Yagna at once could see that something out of the ordinary was going on. The dogs in the farm-yard were barking in great excitement; the little ones, hiding in the orchards, peeped out from behind the trees and hedges; the people, though it was yet far from sunset, were fast coming in from the fields; women were whispering together in groups; every face bore an expression of disquietude, and in every eye there was a look of alarm and suspense.

"What has come about?" she asked the Balcerek girl, peering round the corner of her hut.

"I cannot say; belike soldiers coming from the forest."

"Jesu Maria! Soldiers!" And her knees trembled with terror.

"Young Klemba," added the Prychek girl, as she ran by, "says they are Cossacks from Vola."

In great dismay, Yagna hurried on to her cabin, where her mother, sitting on the threshold, and spinning, was in earnest talk with several women.

"We have both seen the same thing—the men sitting in the porch, and their leader with the priest inside the house."

"And they have sent the organist's lad Michael to fetch the Voyt."

"The Voyt! then it can be no trifle. Ho, ho! something is in the wind!"

"It may be they have only come to collect the taxes."

"With such a number of men? No, they come surely for something more than that."

"Perhaps; but, mark my words, they are here for no good!"

Yagustynka came up. "I," she said, "can tell you why they have come."

All crowded round her, stretching their necks out like so many geese.

"They have come to take us women into the army!" she cried with a croaking laugh that no one took up; and Dominikova remarked sourly:

"Ye must always be making some wretched joke!"

"It is you that are always making mountains of mole-hills! You quake so, your teeth are well-nigh falling out of your heads; yet all are greedy to hear that something is to hap! Much do I trouble about the gendarmes!"

Thereupon Ploshkova, pushing forward her portly figure, began telling them how "something had come over her as soon as she saw those carts . . ."

"Be quiet! Here comes Gregory and the Voyt, running at full speed towards the priest's house."

Their eyes followed the two moving figures on the farther side of the pond.

"Aha! Gregory too is wanted!"

They were wrong. Gregory only pushed his brother in, but stayed himself to look at the carts drawn up there, and to question the drivers who were sitting in the porch. Then, in great distress, he ran to Matthew, who was working at Staho's cabin, and sitting astride on one of the roof-beams, while cutting hollows in it to fix the rafters.

"Not gone yet?" he asked, cutting away as before.

"No; and the worst is, we cannot tell for whom they have come."

"Some evil thing is certainly at hand," old Bylitsa stammered.

"Perchance they come about our meeting. The District Official threatened us then, and the gendarmes have been to and fro, seeking to find out who it is that eggs on the Lipka folk," Matthew said, slipping down to the ground.

"Then they are likely to have come for me!" Gregory rejoined, suddenly breathless with apprehension.

"No, I think they mean to seize Roch!" Staho asserted.



"True, they have inquired about him once already: how could I let that slip my memory?" He felt relieved for himself; but at once said, in distress for the other's fate:

"No doubt, if they have come for anyone, 'tis for him!"

"Well, but shall we let him be taken?" shouted Matthew.

"Him, that is so truly a father to us all!"

"Alas! we cannot resist them, it is not to be thought of."

"Let him hide somewhere—and first let us warn him instantly."

"But peradventure," Staho remarked diffidently, "they may have come on some other errand—the Voyt's business, for instance."

"He must at all events be warned," cried Gregory; and, rushing out into the rye, and working around several gardens, he soon reached Boryna's hut.

Antek was sitting in the porch, putting jagged edges to some sickles on a small anvil. On hearing what the matter was, he started up in alarm.

"He has only just come in.—Roch!" he cried. "Here, we want you."

"What is it?" the old man asked, putting his head out of the window; but before they had time to speak, in dashed Michael, the organist's lad, panting very hard.

"Know, Antek, that the gendarmes are coming to you now, and are already at the mill-pond!"

"For me!" Roch bowed his head with a sigh.

"Jesu Maria!" Hanka shrieked from the threshold, and burst into tears.

"Oh, be quiet!" Antek whispered; he was thinking very hard. "We must hit upon something."

"Roch!" vociferated Michael, breaking off a large branch and looking daggers. "I'll shout the news through Lipka, and we will not give you up!"

"No fooling!—Roch! Get behind the haystack and into the rye this instant. Wiggle into some furrow, hide yourself well, and stay till I call you.—Quick! ere they are here!"

Roch snatched up some papers he had in the room and handed them to Yuzka, who was in bed:

"Hide them under yourself, do not give them up," he whispered.

And just as he was, without hat or capote, he darted into the orchard and vanished like a stone in the waters: they could just see the rye undulating slightly beyond the haystack.

"Now, Gregory, off with you! Hanka, to your work! Go, Michael—and not a word of this!" Antek commanded, sitting down again to his interrupted labour. Again he set to notching the edges of his reaping-hooks, evenly and calmly as before. Now and again he would hold the edge up to the light, glancing the while in every direction about him; for the barking of the dogs was growing louder, and in a little he could hear the heavy tread of the approaching gendarmes, the jingling of their sabres, and the sound of their voices.

His heart was palpitating, his hands were shaking; yet he managed to go on, notching evenly, regularly, with rhythmical strokes, never raising his eyes till the men were standing before him.

"Is Roch in your hut?" asked the Voyt, mortally afraid.

Antek looked around at the group, and replied with great deliberation:

"He must be in the village, I suppose: I have not set eyes on him since this morning."

"Open your doors!" thundered the commanding officer.

"Why, they are open!" Antek growled, getting up from his bench.

The officer and some of his men went in, while the others watched the orchard and outhouses.

About half the village was now outside in the road, looking on in silence, while the cottage was searched and ransacked thoroughly. Antek had to point out and open everything, while Hanka sat by the window with the baby at her breast.

The search was of course fruitless; but they sought everywhere, and were so careful to overlook nothing that one of them even peered under the bed!



Some little books, strapped together, were lying on the table. The officer pounced upon them, and set to examine them with the utmost care.

"How have ye come by these?"

"Belike Roch has left them there . . . and there they lie."

"The mistress here cannot read," the Voyt explained.

"Can anyone amongst you read?"

"No," Antek returned; "they teach us at school so well that now no one is able even to spell out the words in our prayer-books!"

The officer handed the little books to a subordinate, and passed round to the other side of the hut.

"What's here?—A sick child?" he said, taking a step towards Yuzka.

"Yes. She has been lying there for a couple of weeks: small-pox."

He retired hurriedly into the passage.

"Was Roch a lodger in this cabin?" he asked of the Voyt.

"In this or any other, according as it struck him: 'tis the *Dziads'* wont."

They peered into every hole and corner, even looking behind the holy images; while Yuzka followed their movements with eyes full of dread, trembling all over. One of them having approached her, she cried out wildly:

"Oh, have I hidden him under me? Seek him then here, do!"

When they had done, Antek went over to their officer, and said very humbly, with a deep bow:

"Has Roch stolen aught, I should like to know?"

The other, putting his face close to Antek's, replied with a stare, and laying stress on each word:

"Be it but found that you have concealed him, and ye shall go on a journey together, both of you!—Do you hear?"

"I hear indeed, but cannot think what all this means."

And he scratched his head, as if much perplexed.

The officer shot an angry look at him, and left the cabin.

They went round to many another, looking here and there, asking questions of many a one, until sundown; when, the

roads filling with home-driven cattle, they went back empty-handed.

Now the village breathed freely, and people began telling of the searches—at the Klembas'—at Gregory's—at Matthew's—and how each had seen things better than anybody else, and had not been frightened in the least, but had annoyed and bantered the gendarmes to the utmost!

But Antek, once alone with Hanka, said to her, dropping his voice:

"This is a wretched business, I see: there will be no keeping him in our cabin any longer."

"What, turn him out? So holy a man? One that does so much good?"

"A curse on it all! I am sick of it!" he cried, unable to find any way out of the quandary. But Gregory came presently, along with Matthew, and they held a consultation, locked up together in the barn: the cabin, continually full of callers for news, was no fit place.

When they came out, it was quite dark. Hanka had milked the cows, and Pete was back from the forest. Antek got the britzka and directly, while Gregory and Matthew went out, ostensibly to look everywhere for Roch, in reality to mislead the people of the village.

They were indeed all surprised at the quest, having made sure that Roch lay somewhere concealed on Boryna's premises. But the two friends gave out that he had left Boryna's directly after dinner and had not been heard of since.

"Lucky for him, or he would be journeying in chains ere now!"

So it became generally known (as they had planned) that Roch had not been seen in Lipka since noon.

People were glad, and said amongst themselves: "He guessed what was awaiting him, and is off 'to the land where pepper grows.'"

"Let him not come back, I say; we do not want him," old Ploshka growled.

Matthew snarled back at him: "Is he in your way? Has he wronged you in aught?"



"He disturbed the peace and troubled Lipka not a little. We all may yet suffer on his account."

"Then why not seize on him, you, and give him up?"

"Long ago we should have done so, had we any understanding!"

Matthew uttered a curse, and would have flown at him; they held him back, but with difficulty. And then, it being late, they went each man to his own cabin.

Antek was awaiting this moment, when the roads were deserted, and everybody was supping at home, and the scent of fried bacon was wafted abroad with the sound of merry talk and the tinkling of spoons in the dishes; then he brought Roch to the room where Yuzka lay; but he would not have a candle lit.

The old man snatched a hasty meal, put on what clothes he had left in the hut, and said farewell to the women. Hanka fell at his feet, and Yuzka wept and wailed piteously.

"God be with you! we may meet once more!" he said in a tearful voice, pressing them paternally to his breast, and kissing them on the forehead; but, Antek urging him to make haste, he once more blessed the women and children, crossed himself, and went out to the stile by the haystack.

"The britzka is waiting at Simon's hut in Podlesie, and Matthew will drive for you."

"But I must still pay a visit here in Lipka.—Where are we to meet?"

"At the crucifix by the forest, whither we are going at once."

"That's well, for I have yet many things to speak of with Gregory."

And presently he was unseen and inaudible.

Antek put the horses to, placed a bushel of rye and a whole sack of potatoes in the britzka, conferred for some time apart with Vitek, and then said, for all to hear:

"Vitek! drive over to Szymek's hut with the cart, and then come back: do ye hear?"

The lad's eyes blazed, and he started off at such a pace that Antek called after him:

"Slower, you rogue, or you'll lame the horses!"

Roch had meantime crept stealthily to Dominikova's, where he had left a few things, and shut himself up in the inner room.

Andrew was on the watch by the roadside, and Yagna every now and then looked out into the enclosure, while the old woman, sitting in the front room, listened, trembling all over.

It took him some time before he came out to talk a little with Dominikova by herself; then he wanted to take up his bag and start off. But Yagna insisted on carrying it for him, at least to the forest. He agreed, and, taking leave of the others, went out into the fields, and slowly along the narrow pathways, with noiseless caution.

The night was clear and starlit; the lands lay hushed in slumber, with only now and then a sound of fitful barking.

They were nearing the forest, when Roch, coming to a standstill, took Yagna's hand.

"Hear me, Yagna," he said in a kindly tone, "and take to heart what I am going to say."

She lent an ear, though agitated by an unpleasant sense of foreboding.

Then, just as a priest might speak in confession, he talked to her of her doings . . . with Antek . . . with the Voyt . . . and most of all with Yanek.

She listened in deep humiliation, with averted face covered with blushes; but when he named Yanek, she raised her head defiantly.

"With him I have done no evil whatsoever!"

He pointed out gently to her the temptations to which they were exposing themselves . . . the sins and scandals to which the Evil One might give occasion thereby.

But she hearkened to him no longer; her mind was full of Yanek only: unconsciously her bright red lips were murmuring with ardent and frenzied love:

"Yanek, O Yanek!"

Her glowing eyes gazed afar, and circled in fancy over his adored head.



"Oh, I would go with him to the ends of the earth!" she declared, not knowing what she said. At the words, Roch shuddered, cast one look at those wide-open eyes, and held his peace thenceforward.

At the edge of the wood, just by the crucifix, several capotes were seen to glimmer white. Roch stopped, full of misgiving:

"Who is there?"

"Only we—your friends!"

"I am tired, and must rest awhile," he said, sitting down amongst them. Yagna gave up the bag to him, and seated herself not far off, at the foot of the crucifix, in the deep shadow of the branches.

"Well, may your troubles at least come to an end here!"

"The worst of all will come," said Antek, "now that you go from us."

"But it may be, it well may be, that I shall return one day!"

Here Matthew exploded. "Blood of a dog!" he cried; "to hunt men down so . . . as if they were mangy curs!"

Gregory moaned. "And why, Lord God, why?"

"Because," Roch declared with solemn emphasis, "I want truth and righteousness for the people!"

"Hard is every man's lot; but that of the righteous is harder!"

"Do not mourn, Gregory; evil will be changed into good."

"So I think; 'tis hard to fancy that all we do is in vain."

"While we're awaiting the summer, the wolves will eat up our horses," Antek sighed, peering into the darkness at the white blot which was Yagna's face.

"But I say unto you: 'Whoso plucks up the weeds and sows good seeds, great riches shall win, when harvest comes in!'"

"And if he fail?—Such things have been."

"Yea, but he that sows, sows in the hope of gathering in a hundredfold."

"Surely, for who would care to lose his toil?"

And they pondered these things deep in their hearts.

The wind was up now, the birch-trees murmured above them; a rustling sound came out of the forest, while the voice of the waving corn rose up to them from the fields. The moon floated along a pathway in the sky, made up of a double row of white clouds; the trees flung shadows mingled with patches of brightness; goatsuckers passed over their heads with a noiseless circling flight. Their hearts were very full of sadness.

Yagna shed tears in silence: she could not have said why.

"Wherefore do you sorrow?" he asked, laying his hand paternally on her head.

But the others too, all gloomy and cheerless, sat with their eyes fixed upon Roch, whom they now held for a man of God. He was sitting beneath the cross, from which the Crucified seemed to bend forward to bless his white weary head.

Then he spoke these words to them, full of hope and confidence:

"Fear naught for me. I am only a unit—one blade of corn in a fruitful field. If they take me, and I perish, what of that?—So many more remain!—each of us ready to die for the Cause! . . . And the time cometh when there will be thousands of them, from town and country, from cottage and from manor, all incessantly giving up their lives, one after another, piled and heaped together, the stones that are to form into the Holy Church of our desire! And that Church, I say unto you, shall stand and last for ever; and no power of evil shall prevail against it, because it will be built up completely with blood and loving sacrifice!"

Then he told them how no drop of blood, nay, not one single tear, would fall in vain, nor any endeavour be without its fruit; and how on every side, as from a soil abundantly manured, new forces, new defenders, and new victims would spring forth, until that blessed day should dawn—that sacred day, the day of resurrection and of justice and of truth for all the nation!

He spoke with glowing enthusiasm; often, too, of such



high matters that they could not understand all that he said; but his fire inflamed them also, and their hearts leaped up and were exalted by his words in mighty faith and longing. Antek said at last:

"O God!—Be ye our leader: I will follow you even to death!"

"We all will follow you and trample down whatever may resist us!"

"Who can withstand us and prevail? Let him but try!"

So they all spoke, till he was forced to hush their violent words and, drawing them still closer, and whispering, say what that longed-for day would be, and how its coming would be hastened by their labours.

He told them many a thing they had not dreamed of, and they listened breathless, full of dread and joy at once; and every word of his gave them the thrill of faith which one feels at the Communion Table. He opened heaven before them, and made Paradise appear visibly to their eyes; their souls fell prostrate in deep ecstasy, their eyes beheld ineffable wonders, and in their hearts the sweet, sweet hymn of Hope was heard.

"And it is in your power to realize all this," he ended, when quite tired out. The moon was just eclipsed behind a cloud; the sky was grey, the landscape murky; the woods gave forth their inarticulate utterances, and the cornfields rustled and shook as if with fear. Afar there was a noise of dogs that barked. And still they sat there, silent and subdued, listening in rapt attention, inebriated with the words he had said, and feeling as one who has just taken some great vow may feel.

"It is time: I must go!" he said, and, rising, embraced each of them, pressing them to his heart. They could hardly keep back their tears when he knelt down, said a short prayer, and prostrated himself with both arms on the breast of that holy mother—the land which he might perhaps never see again. Yagna sobbed aloud, and the others were struggling with deep emotions.

Such was their parting.

Antek alone went straight back to Lipka, along with Yagna; the others disappeared in the shadows at the edge of the forest.

They long walked on in silence. Then he said: "Beware and say naught to anyone of that which you have heard."

"Am I, then, a pedlar of news from hut to hut?" She was offended.

"And," he added, with stern significance, "God forbid that the Voyt should hear anything of this!"

She answered only by hurrying on; but he would not let her go, and strode on by her side, again and again glancing at her indignant face, bedewed with tears.

The moon shone out again, silvering the narrow pathway where they walked abreast, and throwing across it the black distorted shadows of the trees. Suddenly his heart throbbed fast; his arms quivered with a sense of greedy desire, and he took a step nearer to her side.—He might have gathered her to his breast with a sweeping grasp. But he did not—he durst not. Her stubborn and disdainful silence held him back, and he only said to her bitterly:

"You seem as if you wanted to get away from me."

"Because I do! Someone might see us together, and tongues would wag."

"Are you in a hurry to fly to anyone else?"

"I am. What is to prevent me? Am I not a widow?"

"They say (no idle talk, I see) that you prepare to keep house for a certain priest."

Swift as the wind, she rushed away, her tears falling in torrents down her cheeks.



## CHAPTER XI

ON the lighter soils, they were beginning to reap already; on the heavier, they were preparing all things for the harvest that was about to take place.

It was but a few days after Roch's flight. Lipka was getting the wagons ready for use, cleaning out the barns and airing them with wide-open doors; in the shadow of the orchards, people were busily twisting bands of straw; and within doors the women were busy baking loaves and cooking food for the reapers. All this caused so much racket and turmoil that the village looked as though on the eve of some great festival.

Moreover, a great many people had come over from the neighbouring hamlets, and the roadways to and from the mill, in particular, were as crowded as on a fair-day. Most were taking their corn to be ground; and as if to thwart them, the water ran so low that only one of the falls would work, and even that very feebly. But everyone awaited his turn patiently, because all wanted the corn in their barns ground before harvest-home.

Many besides had come to the miller's to get meal, or groats; some even loaves.

The man himself was ill in bed; but he still directed everything. He would cry out to his wife, sitting outside by the open window:

"Not a kopek's worth on credit for the Rzepki folk! They have patronized the priest's bull: let the priest help them now!"

He was inexorable to all prayers and entreaties: no one that had "patronized" the animal in question was lent even half a quart of flour.

"They prefer his bull to mine," he shouted; "let them get flour out of him now!"

His wife, who was a poorly-looking querulous thing with a bandaged face, would shrug her shoulders; and, when possible, she made loans by stealth to many a one.

Klemba's wife came to ask for half a quart of millet groats.

"Cash down! I'll not sell her one grit on credit!"

This was very embarrassing to her; she had brought no money.

"Your Thomas is hand in glove with the priest: let him lend the groats ye want!"

At this, Klembova took offence, and answered defiantly:

"Aye, he holds with the priest, and still will hold; but never shall he set foot in here again!"

"Slight the plight, brief the grief! Go elsewhere for your meal!"

She withdrew, but in sore perplexity, for there was not a kopék in the house. However, meeting the smith's wife, who sat by the closed forge, as she set to complain to her about the miller's behaviour, the latter returned, with a smile on her face:

"His power, let me tell you, will not last long."

"Alas! who can resist so rich a man?"

"When there's a windmill close by, we shall be able."

Wide-eyed with bewilderment, Klembova stared at her.

"My goodman," she explained, "is building a windmill. He has just set out with Matthew to the forest for timber; it will be put up in Podlesie, close to the crucifix there."

"Well!—Michael build a windmill! I never dreamed of such a thing. . . . Well, well!—But 'twill serve that extortioner right: he has waxed too fat."

Her feelings much relieved, she was hastening home in good spirits, when, seeing Hanka outside her cabin at the washing-tub, she went to tell her that same unexpected bit of news.

Antek, working at a cart just by, overheard her, and said:

"Magda has told you the truth. The smith has pur-



chased a score of acres in Podlesie, close to the crucifix. . . . The miller will go mad with rage! But he has treated us all so that none will pity him."

"Any tidings of Roch?"

"None whatever," he replied, turning away quickly.

"That, methinks, is strange. 'Tis the third day we have no news of him."

"Ah, how often has he disappeared so, and yet come back again to us!"

"Is any one of you," Hanka queried, "going to Chenstohova?"

"Yes: Eva and Matty.—A good few make the pilgrimage this year."

"I too am going; the linen I am washing now is for the journey."

"There will be many from the other villages too, I expect."

"And a good season they have chosen—just when the work is hardest!" Antek grumbled; but he would not forbid Hanka, knowing well to what intention she was making this pilgrimage.

Yagustynka joined them.

"Know ye?" she cried; "John came home from the army about an hour ago!"

"Tereska's goodman! And she was saying he would not be back till autumn!"

"I have just seen him; very well clad . . . and dying to be once more in his home!"

"A good fellow, but a very headstrong one. . . . Is Teresa at home?"

"No, at the priest's, pulling up flax-plants. She has no idea of what's coming."

"There will be trouble again in Lipka. Of course they will tell him all, and at once."

Antek was attentive and much interested, but said nothing. Both Hanka and Klembova were sincerely sorry for the woman, and feared the worst might come to pass. Yagustynka broke in on their talk, saying:

"A fig for the justice of it all! That man of hers leaves her for years and years all alone; and if aught happens to her, poor creature! he is ready to kill her! Where's the justice of that? He may do as he pleases, play the goat as he likes: no one will breathe a word against him.—Things are outrageously ill-managed in the world!—Why, is a woman not a human being just as much as a man is? Is she a block of stone or wood? . . . If she must be punished, then let him who has sinned not a whit the less, be punished likewise. Wherefore is he to have it all enjoyment, while she bears all the punishment?"

"My dear," Klembova observed, "from the beginning it has been so, and so it will be even to the end."

"Yea, so it will be—to the people's hurt, and to the delight of the Evil One; but I would fain have things ordered otherwise. Whoso took his neighbour's wife should be forced to keep her always . . . and if not—a stick for his back, and to jail with the wretch!"

Antek was tickled by her zealous ardour; but she swooped down upon him like a fury.

"Ye find it a laughing matter, do you? *For you it is!* O poisonous villains, to whom every girl is your best-beloved—till she's yours! . . . And after that, ye make a mock of her!"

"A magpie when rain's at hand makes less din than you!" Antek retorted, somewhat out of temper.

She left them, only to return in the evening, weeping bitterly.

"What ill thing has befallen?" Hanka inquired in alarm.

"What ill thing? I have tasted of human sorrow, and the draught has made me faint." She again burst into tears, and said, sobbing all the while: "Kozlova took John in hand and informed him of everything."

"Ah, well, had it not been she, it would have been someone else: no doubt of that."

"But I tell you, that cottage will see some fearful deed done! I went there once: no one was in. Just now, I looked in again. There they sat, both of them—weeping.



On the table lay the presents he had brought for her—all open and unpacked. Lord! a shudder went through me; I felt as when one looks down into a grave. They are saying naught, only weep. Matthew's mother told me all: it made my hair rise."

"Do you know," Antek asked, "whether he said anything about Matthew?"

"He cursed the man most horribly. No, no! he never will forgive him!"

"Do ye think Matthew will whine to him for pardon?" Antek answered in a surly tone, and hurried off to warn his friend at Nastka's hut.

He found her brother deep in talk with her, took him a little down the road, and told him all.

Matthew took in his breath with a hissing gasp, and uttered an oath.

They returned to the village together, Matthew looking gloomy and downcast, and more than once heaving a sigh.

"I see," Antek said, weighing each word, "that you are grievously troubled in mind."

"For her?—Not I! She was sticking like a bone in my throat. No, 'tis something else that perplexes me."

Antek felt surprised, but did not like to ask questions.

"To sorrow over each particular girl of mine the time would not suffice me. She came within my grasp; I took her: who would not have done so? But truly, mine was but the joy of a dog fallen down a well; she has wailed and lamented for ten women. I fled her; she came after me, just like my shadow. Let John now rejoice with her!—I no longer crave for love affairs, but something very different."

"True, it were time for you to take a wife."

"Nastka just now was saying so to me."

"Our village girls are plentiful as poppies, and you have an ample choice."

Matthew blurted out the thoughtless answer: "It was made long ago."

"Then ask me to be your proposer, and have the wedding after harvest-home."

Somehow the idea displeased him; he asked for more particulars about John, talked of Simon's farm, and let out—inadvertently, it seemed—the information that, according to Andrew, Dominikova meant to bring an action against Antek for Yagna's rights as old Boryna's relict.

"But no one denies that Father made a settlement," Antek said. "I'll not give the land up, but will pay her its value to the full. The quarrelsome hag does this for sheer love of a lawsuit!"

"Did Yagna really give the title-deed back to Hanka?"

"Yes, but what of that? she took care not to annul it at the notary's."

This greatly relieved Matthew, who—now unable to conceal all he felt—dropped several words in Yagna's praise.

The whole manœuvre was soon plain to Antek, who only said with a mocking smile:

"Have you heard what they are saying about her now?"

"Oh, those old women are always her enemies!"

"It seems she is running after Yanek, the organist's son. And most shamelessly," he added for greater effect.

Matthew flared up, hot with anger.

"Did ye see that?"

"Nay, I am no spy on her: what is she to me? But those there are who daily see her go out to meet her Yanek . . . in the forest . . . or amongst the corn . . ."

"A good beating for one or two of them would soon put an end to such tales!"

"Try, try; ye may perchance frighten them," Antek responded deliberately, though horribly tortured with jealousy at the thought of Matthew possibly becoming her husband: it bit him with all the venom of a mad dog's fangs.

To what the latter said, though his talk was not infrequently hostile and even offensive, he made no reply, lest he should reveal what he was suffering; but, when they parted, he could not help saying with a malicious smile:

"Whoso marries that woman will have plenty of . . . connexions . . ."

And they parted, not on very friendly terms.



When Matthew had gone a little way, his face grew brighter.

"She is keeping him off; that's what makes him talk so!—Let her run after Yanek!—'Tis but a child; and she cares far more for the priest than for the man."

His thoughts were so extremely lenient, because, having heard from Antek all about the title-deed and the settlement, he had made up his mind to marry Yagna. He slackened his pace to calculate how much he would want to pay off Andrew and Simon, and have the twenty acres all to himself.

"The old woman will be no treat, but she'll not last for ever."

The recollection of Yagna's pranks, indeed, disturbed him, but he said:

"What is over is over; and if she tries new tricks, I'll soon make her give them up!"

Outside the hut, his mother was awaiting him.

"John is back!—He knows all."

"Glad of it! I shall not have to lie."

"Teresa has been in here more than once: talks of drowning herself."

"Indeed, indeed . . . she might do so!"—The thought gave him so fearful a pang that he could not touch his supper, but sat listening for any sounds from John's orchard, which was only separated from theirs by a pathway. His disquietude increasing, he pushed the dish away, and smoked cigarette after cigarette, striving in vain to overcome the fit of trembling that agitated him. He cursed himself and the whole race of women; he tried to jest at the silly business: all would not do. His terror grew more and more, tormenting him past all bearing. He had got up several times to go out and seek company—and yet there he was, remaining in the hut, and he knew not why!

Night had fallen, when he heard steps approaching, and then, coming in with a rush, Teresa had thrown her arms round his neck.

"O Matthew, save me, save me!—O God! how I have been waiting and looking out for you!"

He set her down by his side, but she clung to him like a little child; and with streaming tears she called upon him in the extremity of her despair.

"He has been told all! It never entered my mind that he would really return! . . . I was at work in the priest's flax, when someone came and told me. . . . I had like to fall dead on the spot, and went home with death in my heart. . . . You were out . . . I went to seek you, but could not find you in all Lipka . . . I wandered about very long, but at last had to go in.—He was standing there, white as a sheet; he leaped at me with closed fists . . . and asked for the truth. The truth!"

Matthew, shaking in every limb, wiped the cold sweat from his face.

"So I told it him: of what use would a lie have been? . . . He seized hold of an ax, and I thought it was my last hour . . . I cried out to him: 'Kill me! You'll make all right for both of us!' And he did not even touch me—only flung me a look, sat down by the window, and wept. . . . And now, what am I to do, wretched one? whither shall I go? . . . Save me, you, else I leap into the well, or kill myself in some wise! . . . Save me!" she shrieked, falling on the ground at his feet.

"Poor woman . . . how can I? . . . how can I?" he stammered, humbled in the dust; and she started up with a fierce cry of mad fury.

"Wherefore, then, did you take me? wherefore entice me? wherefore lead me on to sin?"

"Hush, hush! All the village will be here!"

Once more she fell on his breast, embraced and kissed him frenziedly, and exclaimed with all the might of her love and terror and despair:

"O my only one, my chosen one amid a thousand! Slay me, but repel me not!—Do you love me, say? do you love me?—Then comfort me this once, for the last time; gather me in your arms and leave me not to agony and ruin!—You are all I have in the whole wide world; yea, all! Let me



but stay with you . . . I'll serve you as faithfully as any dog . . . aye, I'll be your slave!"

Such were the words of passion she sobbed out, wrung from the bottom of her broken heart.

Matthew was as one held in a vice, and squirming and writhing to get free. Avoiding a straightforward answer, he strove to soothe her with kisses and caresses and words of affection, agreeing to all she said, and all the while looking around with impatience and dread; for he suspected that John was sitting on the stile just outside.

A moment later, the true state of things flashed suddenly on Teresa's mind: she thrust him from her, with words that struck him like blows:

"Liar and cur! You have always lied to me, but never shall you deceive me any more! . . . You are afraid—afraid lest John beat you; and therefore you turn and twist now, like a trodden worm! And I trusted to him as to the best of men? O Lord, O Lord! And John, who has been so good to me! The presents he has brought—presents for *me*!—Never yet did I hear him speak an unkind word; and how have I repaid him? By giving my trust to a traitor, to a villain! . . . Go your ways to Yagna!" she shrieked, rushing towards him with clenched fists. "Go—and may the hangman wed you both!—A well-matched pair—a wanton and a thief!"

And with an awful shriek, she fell fainting to the ground.

Matthew stood beside her, at a loss what to do; his mother sat whimpering by the wall.—Then John strode in from the orchard to his wife, and spoke to her . . . words of tender sorrowing consolation.

"Come to my home, forlorn one, come! Fear me not; I shall do you no hurt! Oh, no! you have suffered enough as it is.—Come, my wife!"

He took her by the hand, and helped her over the stile; then, turning to Matthew, he thundered:

"But the wrong you have done her, never will I forgive—never while there's life in me!—So help me God!"

Choked with shame, Matthew answered never a word. His soul was full of such bitterness, such grinding torments, that he flew to the tavern and drank all night long.

The event was at once known throughout the village, and all were full of admiration and respect for John's conduct.

"There's not another man in the world like him!" the women said, moved even to tears; but at the same time they blamed Teresa with the utmost severity; all except Yagustynka, who took her part with great zeal.

"Teresa is not in fault!" she cried, when hearing her spoken against in orchards and enclosures. "She was all but a child when John's military service began. Alone and childless as yet, she wanted some loving friend about her. And Matthew, like a hound, caught up the trail; and he flattered and fondled her, and took her out to hear the band play . . . till the poor silly girl's head was turned!"

One of them said with a sigh:

"Why is there no law to punish such deceivers?"

"He has some grey hairs already, yet runs after women as ever!"

"But how's a wretched bachelor to live, unless he takes another's property?" objected the young men, jeering.

"If she's not to blame, no more is he," said Staho Ploshka; "where there's no giving, there's no taking." For which ribaldry he was well-nigh assaulted by the women.

But the matter was not discussed very long: the harvest was at hand, the weather magnificent. On the uplands, the rye was, as it were, asking to be reaped; the barley was not much behind, and they went daily to inspect it. Already reapers were being engaged by the richer peasants.

The organist opened the harvest with a dozen or so of hired women reapers; his wife and daughters too took a hand in the work, while he superintended them all most watchfully. Yanek came only after Mass to help, and did not enjoy the fun long; his mother sent him home as soon as the noonday heat set in, fearing lest the sun might give him a headache. Kozlova grumbled:

"He's going to find shade at Yagna's—that's his game!"



At home, however, it was not only very hot, but very troublesome because of the pitiless attacks of the flies there: so he went out into the village, passing outside the Klembas'. There he caught the sound of moans, issuing from within the wide-open cabin door.

It was Agata, lying in the passage, close to the threshold; everybody else had gone a-reaping.

He carried her into the room, laid her on a bed, gave her to drink, and revived her, so that, after a time, she opened her eyes.

"'Tis the end coming, young master," she said with a childlike smile.

He would have run for the priest, but she caught at his soutane to prevent him.

"To-day the Blessed Virgin said to me: 'Be ready for to-morrow, weary soul!' So there is time still, young master! —To-morrow!—Thanks, thanks, O most merciful Lord!" she faltered, and her voice trailed away into silence. A smile flickered on her lips; she clasped her hands and, looking far away, sank into a state of profound mental prayer. Yanek, now sure that her last hour was drawing near, went to fetch the Klembas.

It was only in the afternoon that he came back there again. She lay on her bed, completely conscious. Her open locker stood beside her on a bench, and her hands, now very cold, had taken out of it all the effects she had provided for the present occasion: a clean sheet to be placed under her body; fresh bed-linen; holy water and a sprinkler still in good condition; a long piece cut off from a death-taper; an image of Our Lady of Chenstohova, to be put in her hands after death; a new chemise, a beautifully striped skirt, a cap deeply frilled about the forehead, a kerchief to bind over it, and a pair of shoes that had never yet been worn. This complete funeral outfit, got together by begging during the course of her life, she had now spread around her, delighted with every article and praising its quality to those about her; she even peeped into a looking-glass, and whispered with great pleasure:

"How grand it will be! I look quite like a notable goodwife."

She directed them to dress her in all that splendid clothing at early dawn on the morrow.

No one opposed or thwarted her: everyone went about to make her last hours as happy as could be.

Yanek sat beside her bed till dusk, reading prayers aloud, which she said after him, smiling faintly now and then.

When they sat down to supper, she asked for scrambled eggs; but she only took one or two mouthfuls, pushed the dish away, and then lay still all the evening, only calling old Klemba to her before she went to sleep.

"All is well," she said anxiously; "I shall not trouble you long . . . not long!"

Next morning, clad as she had desired, she was laid on Dame Klemba's bed, but with her own bedding. She saw that everything was properly arranged, and with her own trembling hands smoothed down her thin feather-bed, poured out the holy water and placed the sprinkler in the basin; and then, all being ready, she asked for the priest.

He came, bringing our Lord, and, having prepared her for her last journey, desired Yanek to stay by her side till the end.

This he did, and sat saying his hours there. The Klembas too remained within doors, and Yagna soon came round and ensconced herself quietly in a corner. All were very still, and moved about like shadows, with eyes anxiously fixed upon Agata, who lay, rosary in hand, and still quite conscious, bidding farewell to all who came in. To some children that peeped in at the door and window, she distributed a few kopeks.

"That's for you," she whispered cheerfully; "but say a prayer for Agata."

Thus she lay in state, "as behoved a goodwife," on a bed, with holy pictures above her—and just as it had been the dream of her life to die! She was in a state of serene elation, of unspeakable happiness, and tears of joy were rolling down her cheeks. Her lips moved in faint but rapturous



smiles as she gazed into the depths of heaven, on the vast expanse of fields, dotted with ringing and glittering scythes, and heaped with sheaves of rye, heavy and ripe—and into those farther abysses, visible only to her departing soul.

Now, as the day was just drawing to its close, and the red glow of sundown flooded all the room, a violent shudder came over her; she sat up, stretched out her arms, and cried in a loud changed voice:

"Now my time has come—it has come!"

And she sank back.

A loud and mournful sound of wailing burst forth; all knelt down beside the bed, and Yanek read the Prayers for the Dying. Klembova lit the death-taper; Agata, grasping it, said the prayers after Yanek; but her voice, feebler and feebler, died away; her eyes, wearied by life, grew dim like that closing summer day. The greyness of everlasting twilight spread over her face; she dropped the taper and died.

So passed away that poor beggar-woman—as if she had been the foremost dame in Lipka! Ambrose, who had come in that very instant, closed her eyes; Yanek said a fervent prayer for her soul, and the whole village flocked round her body, to pray—to lament—and to wonder, not without envy, at so blissful a death, so peaceful an end.

But Yanek, gazing on those lifeless eyes, and that face, furrowed by the claws of death, and in hue like frost-stiffened clay, felt so terribly panic-stricken that he took to flight and, running home, flung himself on his bed, pressed his head upon the pillow, and wept aloud.

Yagna had followed close on his heels. She was herself unnerved and broken down, but set herself to comfort him and wipe the tears from his eyes. He turned to her as to a mother, laid his aching head upon her bosom, threw his arms round her neck, and burst into a tempest of sobs:

"O my God!" he cried; "how awful, how horrible death is!"

And at that moment his mother came in, saw and was filled with rage at the sight.

"What's this?" she hissed, rushing at them, and scarcely

stopping half-way. "Look at her, this tender nurse of ours! Pity—is it not?—that Yanek needs no nurse now, and is old enough to blow his own nose!"

Yagna raised her eyes, brimming over with tears, and in great perturbation set to telling her about Agata's death. Yanek also came forward, eager to explain the whole affair, and say how upset and overwhelmed he had been. But his mother had already been much nettled by the gossip she had heard, and cut him short.

"You're a silly calf! Best say naught, lest an evil thing happen to you!"

Then, striding to the door, she threw it wide open, and vociferated:

"As to you, woman—out! . . . And never set foot here any more, else I set the dogs at you!"

"But what evil have I done?" Yagna stammered, beside herself with shame and mortification.

"Off with you this instant, or I'll have the dogs loosed!—I do not mean to weep because of you, as Hanka and the Voytova have wept! You minx, you baggage! I'll teach you—I'll teach you to come love-making here—and ye shall remember the lesson!" she screamed at the top of her voice.

Yagna, bursting into tears, fled out of the room . . . and Yanek stood thunderstruck.



## CHAPTER XII

ON a sudden he made a start to rush after her.  
"Whither?" his mother asked grimly, blocking the way.

"Why—why have ye turned her out? Because she was so kind to me? It is unjust—unjust—and I will not have it.—What wrong thing has she done, say?" he cried, struggling violently in his mother's powerful grasp.

"Sit down quietly, or I'll call Father. . . . What has she done, hey?—I'll tell you at once. You are to be a priest: I will not see you taking a mistress under my very roof, nor load yourself with such shame and disgrace that folk will point their fingers at you as you go by! That's why I expelled her. And now you know!"

"Lord Almighty!—What is this you say?" he cried indignantly.

"What I know well.—I was aware that you had meetings with her; but, as God is my witness, I never suspected you of any wickedness! For I thought that if my son wore a priest's habit, he would not drag it in the mud—not make me curse him for ever—not force me to tear him out of my heart, and break my heart in the tearing!" As she spoke, her eyes flamed with such holy indignation that Yanek was petrified with amazement. "Kozlova," she went on to say, "was the first to open mine eyes; and now I myself have seen how this drab was trying to inveigle you!"

He burst into a flood of tears, and brokenly—between fits of sobbing and complaints of her monstrous suspicions—told her so frankly all about their meetings that her trust in him was completely restored. She pressed him to her heart, and wiped his tears, and soothed him.

"Now do not marvel if I feared for you. Why, she is the worst trull in the whole village!"

"Yagna . . . the worst . . . !" He could not believe his ears.

"It shames me to speak of such things; but for your good I must." She thereupon poured forth all the scandalous tales in circulation against Yagna, sparing him none of them.

Yanek shook with horror, and started up at last, crying:

"This cannot be; I will never believe her so vile."

"Take heed; 'tis your mother who speaks; these are no lying inventions of hers."

"But they must be lies! Were they true, it would be too horrible." And he wrung his hands in despair.

"What makes you defend her so stoutly? Answer me that!"

"I must defend anyone—anyone that's innocent."

"You're an arrant fool!" She was losing her temper; his disbelief pained her deeply.

"If ye think me so—well.—But supposing Yagna so wicked, how could ye let her come to our house?" he asked, flushing as red as an angry young turkey-cock.

"I have not to justify my doings to you, a simpleton who could not understand me. But this I say to you: keep away from her! For if I meet you with her, I will—aye, even before the whole village, I will—give her a drubbing she will not get over for a month!—And you too may get a taste of the same!"

With these words she went out, slamming the door.

Yanek, not suspecting at all why Yagna's good name was so very dear to him, remained thinking over his mother's words, and chewing the cud of his bitter reflections till his soul was sickened with the nauseous taste.

"She that kind of woman? She, Yagna?" he groaned, with such stern abhorrence that, had she then appeared before him, he would have turned from her with angry loathing. Why, the very thought of such things had never come to his mind! And now he was forced to ponder them, with ever-increasing anguish! Many a time he was on the



point of running out to throw all those many sins and wicked deeds in her teeth. "Let her know what folk say, and clear herself, if she can. Let her declare that they are all falsehoods!" He went on musing feverishly, now more and more inclined to think that she was perhaps not in fault. . . . Sorrow for her took hold of him; and then there was a secret longing for her in his mind . . . and the memories of their past meetings came back, not without a certain sense of sweetness. . . . Then his eyes grew dim with a bright haze of vague delight; and, with a mysterious pang at his heart, he sprang up, crying out, as to the whole world:

"'Tis untrue—untrue—untrue!"

At supper, he did not raise his eyes from his plate, shunned his mother's glances, and sat speechless, though they were talking of Agata's death. Gloomy, fastidious in his eating, tiresome to his sisters, querulous about the heat in the house, he got up as soon as the meal was done, and went over to the priest's. His Reverence, sitting pipe in mouth in the porch, was busy talking of various affairs with Ambrose. He kept away from them and walked about under the trees, in company with his painful thoughts.

"And yet, it may be true! Mother could never have invented that!"

From the windows of the house, long streaks of light played upon the lawn and flower-beds, where the dogs frolicked and snarled in fun. Gruff voices came to him from the porch:

"Have you seen the barley at 'Swine's Hollow?'"

"The stalks are still somewhat green; the grains are dry as pepper."

"You must air the vestments, they are getting quite ruined with mould.—And take my surplus and the albs to Dominikova's for Yagna to wash.—Who was it brought his cow here this afternoon?"

"Someone from Modlitsa. The miller met him on the bridge and vaunted his bull, and even offered the use of the beast gratis; but the man preferred ours."

"He was right. One rouble will give him a lifelong profit

. . . and a first-rate breed of cows.—Know ye if the Klembas are to pay Agata's funeral fees?"

"No, she herself has left ten *zloty* for her burial."

"She shall be buried, as grandly as any village dame!—Ah! by the way, tell the Confraternity Brethren that I will sell them my unbleached wax; the bleached wax they may want they must buy elsewhere. To-morrow Michael will see to the church; you must go round and tell the reapers to hurry. The weather-glass stands at 'Variable,' and we may have a storm.—When are they starting for Chenstohova?"

"They have asked for a votive Mass on Thursday."

This talk getting on Yanek's nerves, he walked farther away to a low lattice-work fence that separated the orchard from the apiary, where he paced to and fro along a narrow path overhung by trees, the apple-laden boughs coming in frequent contact with his head.

It was a stifling evening, redolent of honey close by, and of the rye cut down a little farther; the sultry air was saturated with heat. The whitewashed trunks glimmered in the shadows, like shirts hung out to dry. From the Klembas', the dismal moaning of the dirges was heard.

Weary of thinking over his trouble, Yanek was going home, when his ear caught the muffled sound of persons whispering eagerly together in the apiary.

He could see no one, but stopped and listened, holding his breath.

. . . "Get along. . . Let me alone, or I shall scream."

" . . . foolish . . . why struggle? . . . I am doing nothing wrong . . . nothing wrong."

. . . "Someone may hear. . . Loose me, for God's sake. . . You're breaking my ribs!"

Yanek knew the voices: Pete from Boryna's and Maryna the priest's maidservant were there! He walked away, somewhat amused at their courtship, but, after a few paces, returned and listened with absorbing interest. It was impossible to see anything for the thick bushes and the dark night, but he was soon able to make out their broken words, that were now more distinct, more ardent, like spurts



of flame; at times, too, there was the sound of a tussle and of deep-drawn breaths.

"... as nice as any of Yagna's . . . you shall see, Maryna . . . only . . ."

"Trust you indeed? . . . Am I such a one? . . . For God's sake, let me breathe!"

There was a heavy fall upon the ground; the bushes cracked and snapped; then they seemed to pick themselves up, and whispers and chuckles and kisses went on as before.

"Sleep has quite fled from me now . . . all for thinking of you, Maryna . . . of you, O dearest!"

"To every girl you say that! . . . I waited till midnight . . . courting someone else . . ."

Yanek trembled like an aspen leaf.—The wind sprung up, making the trees to rustle faintly, as if talking in their sleep; the heavy scent of honey from the apiary oppressed him so, he could scarcely breathe; his eyes watered, a hot thrill went through him, an obscurely pleasurable sensation pervaded his whole being.

"... as far from me as any star!—'Tis to Yanek she has an eye at present! . . ."

Mastering his emotion, Yanek bent over the fence and gave ear, in spite of his growing excitement.

"True, she goes out to him every night . . . Kozlova surprised them in the wood together . . ."

Here everything began to turn round, his eyes saw nothing and he almost fell swooning. Meanwhile, the sound of kisses and low laughter and whispering continued.

"If you . . . I'll scald your head with boiling water! . . . Pete! . . . Pete!"

He had heard enough. He rushed away, swift as the wind, tearing his soutane on the way, and reached home as red as a beet-root, perspiring profusely, and in a fever of excitement. Luckily, no one paid attention to him. His mother, sitting by the fire-place, was singing under her breath the evening hymn,

"All our actions of this day,  
At Thy feet, O Lord, we lay,"

and spinning the while; his sisters and Michael, who was polishing the church candlesticks, joined in. His father was in bed.

He went to his room and began to say his hours. But, strive as he would to attend to the Latin words, his mind was always harking back to the whispers and kisses he had overheard. At last, dropping his head on the book, he unconsciously gave way to the thoughts which came over him like a burning blast.

"So? . . . Are things so?" he mused, with growing horror, and a thrill that was nevertheless not unpleasant. "*Are things so!*" he suddenly repeated aloud; and to get rid of the abominable fancies that beset him, he put his breviary under his arm, and went to his mother, telling her, in a low subdued voice, that he was going to pray by Agata's body.

"Yes, go, dearest; I will come for you later!" she returned, with a glance very full of love.

Klemba's cabin was almost empty. Only Ambrose was there, mumbling out of a book, beside the deceased who lay covered with a sheet. At the head of the bed, the death-taper burned, stuck in a small jug. Fruit-laden apple-boughs peered in at the open window; and now and then a belated passer-by peered in too. In the passage, the dogs growled low.

Yanek knelt down close to the light, and fell to his prayers with such intense fervour that he never knew when Ambrose got up and hobbled home. The Klembas had lain down to rest in the orchard.—The first cock had crowed before his mother, remembering, came to fetch him home.

But no slumber came to his eyelids there. Each time he fell into a doze, Yagna's form appeared to him with such lifelike reality that he started up in bed, rubbed his eyes, and looked around in horror—only to see that all the place was quiet, and to hear his father snoring sonorously.

"Ah! . . . Perhaps . . . perhaps *that* was what she desired?" he thought, as the memory of her scorching kisses



and flaming eyes and husky voice came back to him. "And I—I thought it but . . ." He shook himself, overwhelmed with anger and shame. He leaped out of bed, opened the window wide, and, seated on the sill, pondered till day-break with profound sorrow over his involuntary offences and temptations.

At Mass the next morning, he did not venture to raise his eyes; but he prayed all the more earnestly for Yagna, in whose great guilt he now believed entirely, although hatred and disgust for her were beyond his power.

"What's the matter?" the priest said to him in the sacristy after Mass. "You were sighing so hard, you almost put out the candles!"

"My soutane makes me so hot!" he answered evasively, averting his face.

"When you are accustomed to it, 'twill be as easy to wear as your own skin!"

Yanek kissed his hand and went off to breakfast, picking out the shadows along the mill-pond, for the heat was broiling. On the way, he met Maryna pulling the priest's blind old mare along by the mane, and singing a noisy song.

His recollections of her stung him to the quick, and he went up to her in an angry mood.

"What makes you rejoice so, Maryna?" And he gazed at her with shamefaced curiosity.

"The hey-day in my blood!" she replied, showing her white teeth in a broad grin; and she went on pulling at the mare's mane and singing still more noisily.

"Merry! . . . and after what she has done!" He turned away hastily from the girl—whose skirt was tucked up almost to her snowy knees—and went on to the Klembas'. There Agata lay in high state and in the centre of the dwelling-room, arrayed in her best holiday attire, wearing her cap, deeply frilled over the brows, many strings of beads round her neck, and a new striped skirt, and shoes laced with bright red laces. Her face seemed moulded in bleached wax, and full of a marvellous joy. Her cold

stiffened fingers held the holy image, somewhat awry; two tapers burned at the bed's head. Yagustynka was brushing the flies away with a bough. The smoke of juniper-berries was wafted through the room from the fire-place. Every now and then somebody came in to pray for her soul, and several children were playing about outside.

Yanek, not without some qualms, looked into the dark room.

"The Klembas have gone to town," Yagustynka whispered. "As she has left them no small amount, they have to deck themselves out for her funeral. For is she not their kinswoman? Surely! But the body will be taken out only this evening; Matthew has not finished the coffin yet."

The room was close; and, besides, that waxen face with its changeless smile looked so ghastly that he must needs cross himself and go out speedily. On the door-step, he met Yagna and her mother entering. She stopped on seeing him, but he passed her by without a word, not even the usual "Praised be Jesus Christ!" It was only on nearing the fence that he inadvertently turned round. She was still standing where he had passed her, gazing mournfully after him.

Going home, he would take no breakfast, pretexting a headache.

"Go out for a walk; it may pass away," his mother advised.

"Mother! where am I to go? Ye will directly fancy . . . who knows what?"

"Yanek, how can you speak so?"

"Why, Mother, have you not locked me up in our house? Can I go out, if I must not speak to people?"

His nerves were overstrung, and he made his mother suffer in consequence. . . . It all ended, however, in her bandaging his head with a compress dipped in vinegar, and making him lie down in a darkened room. She drove the children out of the yard, and watched over her boy like a hen over her chicken till he had slept well and eaten a good meal.



"And now go for a walk; and go by the poplar road, where 'tis cooler because of the shade."

He did not reply, but, seeing that she carefully noted the way he took, chose the opposite direction on purpose. He strayed about the village, looked in at the forge and the hammers as they smote with deafening din on the anvil; he peeped into the mill, entered garden after garden, and went past the flax-fields and wherever the crimson gleam of a woman's dress was to be seen. Then he sat and talked with Mr. Yacek, tending Veronka's cows by a field-path, went on to Simon's cottage in Podlesie, where they refreshed him with some milk, and came back late in the afternoon, without having seen Yagna anywhere.

It was only the next day, at Agata's funeral, that he met her; her eyes were fixed upon him during all the service. The letters of his book danced before his eyes, and he mistook his Responses. As the body was on its way to the churchyard, she walked almost at his side, utterly indifferent to the fierce glances and loud murmurs of his mother; she felt herself melting in his presence like snow in the spring sunshine!

When the coffin was lowered into the grave and the customary lamentations broke forth, his ear caught the sound of her wailing; but he knew well that those sobs were not for Agata, and that they flowed from the fullness of a sorely pained and wounded heart.

"I must—I must have speech with her!"

His mind was made up on this point on returning from the funeral, but he could not get free at once. Many people from the other hamlets, and even some from neighbouring parishes, had come to Lipka about noon, in order to join in the pilgrimage.

This was to start the next morning at once after the votive Mass had been sung; and all were now slowly assembling, so that the road by the mill-pond was crowded with carts. A great many, too, had gone to the priest's bureau, and Yanek had to stay and help his Reverence in settling many various matters. It was only quite at evening that he found

a convenient time to take his book and slip out behind the barn and to that pear-tree under which he had once sat together with Yagna.

He never opened the book at all, but threw it somewhere away into the grass. Then, looking round the fields, he entered the rye; and stealthily, almost creeping on all fours, he made his way to Dominikova's garden.

And Yagna was there just then, digging up new potatoes. She had no notion that anyone was gazing at her. Now and then she would draw herself up wearily, look about her with very mournful eyes, and utter a long and heavy sigh.

"Yagna!" he exclaimed timidly.

She turned suddenly pale as a sheet of canvas, scarcely believing her own eyes, and well-nigh regarding him as a miraculous vision.

Yanek's eyes were filled with light, and his heart with the sweetness of honey. But, mastering himself, he only sat down in silence, gazing upon her with an irresistible sense of delight.

"I feared I should never see you again, Master Yanek!"

As a scented breeze, blowing up from the meadows upon him, so was the sound of her voice to his soul, thrilled with inexpressible rapture!

"Yesterday evening, outside the Klembas' house, ye would not even look at me!"

She stood before him, flushed like a rose-bush in flower; like a spray of apple-blossoms, all drooping with desire; full of comeliness and altogether lovely.

"And I thought my heart would break!" she added, tears standing like diamonds on her long eyelashes, and veiling the dark azure of the heavens behind.

"Yagna!" he cried; it was a cry from the core of his inmost heart.

She knelt down in a furrow close by and, pressing close to his knees, fixed upon him the fiery depths of her eyes—those eyes as clear, yet as unfathomable, as the sky—those eyes whose looks went to the head like kisses, or the caresses



of a beloved hand—those eyes instinct at once with subtle temptation and with absolute simplicity.

With a violent effort to shake himself free from the spell she was casting over him, he spoke to her sternly and recounted all the sins and evil deeds of which his mother had told him. She drank in all his words eagerly, her eyes fastened upon him, but scarcely at all understanding what he said, absorbed as she was in the one feeling and knowledge and consciousness of his being by her side—he, the chosen of her soul amongst all!—of his saying something, of his eyes gleaming bright; and of her kneeling before him as before the image of a saint, and praying to him with the deep, deep faith of love!

"Say now," he concluded with energetic entreaty, "say, Yagna, say of all this: 'Tis untrue!"

"'Tis untrue!—untrue!" she repeated, and with such transparent sincerity that he could not but believe her. Then she, leaning forward, rested her breast against his knees . . . and in low trembling utterances confessed her love. . . . She opened wide her soul to him, as if to a father confessor, threw herself down before him as a stray worn-out bird might fall; and with an ardent entreaty, that sounded like a prayer, she gave herself up without reserve to his love . . . to do with her whatsoever he would.

Yanek trembled like a leaf tossed in a furious tempest, tried to push her from him and escape; but his mind was dazed, and he could only whisper faintly:

"Hush, Yagna, hush! say not such things, they are sinful!"

Then she ceased from speaking, being quite exhausted. And they both were silent; neither did they dare to look into each other's eyes, but yet they pressed together so closely that they could feel each other's hearts beat, and the hot stifled panting of their bosoms. Both felt infinite rapture and gladness; tears streamed down their pale cheeks, but a smile played on the lips of both, and both their souls were plunged in deep serene beatitude.

The sun had now gone down, the earth was bathed in the after-glow, as with a golden dew. All was still; all things held their peace, listening, as it were, to the sounds of the *Angelus*; everything seemed in orison—a prayer of quietude and thanksgiving for the blessing of the day that was over.—And they then went forth through the dusky fields, along the pathways overgrown with wild flowers, across the ripe cornlands, brushing aside the drooping ears as they walked; on they went, with eyes fixed upon the western fires, on the vast golden abysses of heaven, with heaven in their eyes, and heaven in their hearts, and a heaven-like aureole around them!

Not a word was spoken—not a single one; but at times their looks crossed like lightning flashes: each, wearied out in self-conflagration, was unconscious of what the other felt.

Nor were they conscious, either, of the wonderful hymn they were singing, which, having sprung up within their souls, was flying afar on every side, over the darkening fields.

Neither did they so much as know where they were, or whither going, or to what end.

A harsh hoarse voice broke upon their dreams on a sudden:

“Yanek!—Home!”

He was instantly recalled to his senses, and found himself in the poplar road, his mother standing in front of them both, grim-visaged and inexorable!—At the sight, he faltered, stammered, and uttered some unmeaning words.

“Home!”

She caught hold of his unresisting hand, and he followed meekly as she pulled him along.

Yagna, as if spellbound, was coming after them. The old dame picked up a stone from the road, and hurled it at her with all her strength.

“Hence!—Bitch, to your kennel!” she shrieked with foul-mouthed abuse.

Yagna looked round, really unaware that the words were



meant for her. When they had disappeared, she wandered about the lanes for a long time, and when all the lights were out, she went and sat outside her cabin till it was again broad day.

The hours passed by; the villagers one by one rose and went to their daily duties; and she still sat plunged in day-dreams of her Yanek; of his speech with her, of their mutual glances—and so near together! of their having gone somewhere and sung something . . . something she could not remember. . . . And always, always the same dream, endlessly repeated!

Her mother woke her to reality; but Hanka did the waking yet more effectually. She came, dressed for her journey, and timidly stretched out her hand to make peace with them.

"I am going to Chenstohova. Pray forgive me if I have sinned in aught against you."

"Your words are kind, and I thank you," the old dame growled; "but what ye have done, ye have done."

"Let us not go into that!—I entreat you most sincerely to pardon me."

"I bear you no malice in my heart," Dominikova returned, sighing heavily.

"Nor do I, though I have suffered not a little," Yagna said gravely; and then, as the Mass-bell was ringing, went to dress for church.

"Do you know," Hanka said, after a pause, "that Yanek, our organist's son, is coming with us to Chenstohova? His mother told me herself that he has insisted on making the pilgrimage."

Hearing these words, Yagna rushed out half dressed.

"In the company of our little priest, we shall journey better and more respectably. . . . And so, farewell!"

They parted on friendly terms, and she went on to church, telling her news as she went. Everybody was surprised, and old Yagustynka shook her head, saying:

"There's more in this than meets the eye! If he goes, it is not willingly. Not he!"

But there was no discussing the matter now: half the village was in church, and the Pilgrimage Mass had already begun.

Yanek was serving, as usual; but his face looked paler, and bore an unusual expression of pain. Then his eyes were discoloured, and still brimmed with tears, through which he saw, as through a mist, the church, and Teresa lying on the pavement all the time with outstretched arms, and Yagna's terrified glances, and his mother, sitting in the Manor pew, and the pilgrims coming up to receive Holy Communion: all these were dimly seen through his tears, while pang after pang rent his heart, overwhelmed with mortal anguish.

From the altar, the priest took leave of the pilgrims, and, as they pushed their way out of the church, sprinkled them with holy water, and gave them his blessing. The banner was raised, the glittering cross opened the way before them, a hymn was struck up—and they set off upon their journey.

Yagna accompanied them, along with her mother and the rest of the village. She looked very ill, and her soul was quivering in the grip of agony. Swallowing down her bitter burning tears, she kept her eyes fixed on the boy who was all in all to her; but now she viewed him from afar, because his mother and brothers and sisters crowded jealously round him, and she could not even see him properly, much less have speech with him.

Matthew, her mother, and several others addressed her, but she paid them scant attention. She thought of this only: that her Yanek was going away for ever; that never, never should she see him more!

They accompanied the pilgrims as far as the crucifix at the edge of the forest; these continued their march, singing until they were out of sight, and only a cloud of dust told vaguely of their whereabouts.

"Why is this?" she moaned, dragging herself wearily back to the village.

"I shall fall down, I shall die!" What she felt within her she really took for the coming of death, so completely



had the agonies she had endured shorn her of her strength.

"What, oh, what shall I do now?" she said, looking out upon the day, so desolate for her, so hateful with its dazzling light.

She longed, how intensely! for the silent hours of night; but they brought her no consolation. Until dawn, she went wandering about the premises, along the road, even as far as Podlesie and that cross where she had for the last time seen Yanek; and with eyes that smarted with the strain, she looked up the long wide sandy track, as though seeking some trace of his footsteps, the place where his shadow had passed—a clod of earth his foot had touched.

Alas! there was nothing—nothing for her anywhere—no more love—no more hope!

Even her tears failed her in the end, although her eyes, full of awful desolation and despair, glittered like fathomless fountains of sorrow.

Now and then, when she prayed, there would burst from her lips the bitter complaint: "O my God! wherefore, whereto, is all this suffering?" . . .

## CHAPTER XIII

LIFE was fast becoming impossible at Dominikova's. Yagna was always straying about like someone distraught, heedless of everything in the world. Andrew did his work in a slovenly way, and his absences at Simon's grew more frequent. The farm had fallen into complete neglect. Sometimes the cows were driven un milked to the pastures, and the pigs were squealing for food all day long, and the horses gnawed at their empty racks. The old dame could not do all by herself, having to grope about with her stick, half blind and her eyes bandaged. No wonder if she almost went mad with trouble and mortification.

She hired a *komornitsa* for the work, and did all she could, both by herself and by her influence over her children. But Yagna seemed deaf to all entreaties and remonstrances; and Andrew, when threatened, would answer back insolently:

"Ye have driven Simon away: work ye by yourself. He wants you not, is in no trouble, has a hut, has money, has a wife, has a cow—and is an out-and-out good farmer!"—But, saying these words, he took good care to keep out of her reach.

"Aye, aye," she answered, with a dreary sigh; "truly, that unnatural wretch has contrived to succeed in all things."

"Yes, and he manages so well that even Nastka is astonished!"

"I must" (she spoke her thoughts aloud) "hire someone to work regularly, or take a farm-servant."

Andrew scratched his head, and said with some hesitation: "But why take a stranger, when Simon is there, if ye'll but say the word?"

"Do not meddle when you're not asked!" she snarled; but



all the same, she felt—and it was a bitter pill to swallow—that she would sooner or later have to give way and come to terms with Simon.

But what made her most anxious was Yagna's state. From her she could get no clue; and she went on piling surmises on surmises, unpleasant fancies on fancies not less unpleasant, till at last, one Saturday afternoon, she could bear it no longer, and—bearing a large duck with her as an offering—groped her way to the priest's house.

She came back only at evening, in great agitation, crying and wailing like an autumn wind at night; but, until she was alone with Yagna after supper, she spoke no word.

Then, "Do you know," she said, "what tales are afloat concerning you and Yanek?"

"I am no lover of gossip!" her daughter answered unwillingly, raising her eyes, that shone with a feverish glow.

"But you have to know this . . . and to learn, too, that there's no hiding things from neighbours' eyes.—'What's done in silence is spoken of aloud.'—They say most fearful things of you."

Then she told her every particular that she had gleaned from the organist's wife and from his Reverence.

" . . . That very night they held judgment upon him; his father gave him a beating; the priest added some blows from his long pipe-stem; and he has been sent to Chenstohova, to protect him from you!—Do you hear that? Oh, think what you have done!" she cried indignantly.

"Jesu Maria!—Yanek beaten!—Beaten!—O God, O God!" And she started up with a mad idea of doing something . . . but sat down again and hissed between her teeth:

"May their arms wither, may their hands rot off! And when the plague comes, may they not be spared!" She then wept bitterly, with the tears streaming from her swollen eyes, like blood from a freshly opened wound.

Careless of her agony, Dominikova still continued to lash her with her tongue; and each word was a blow. She reminded her of all her many sins and transgressions, omit-

ting not a single one, and pouring out before her all the bitterness that she had endured in silence for ever so long.

"Can you not see that all this must come to an end? that you cannot live on any more in this wise?" she cried, more and more pitilessly, though she herself was weeping, and the tears fell under her bandage down her cheeks. "Shall you be held the lowest of the low? Shall all men point their fingers at you now?—Oh, what a shame for my old age, good Lord! Oh, what a shame!" she murmured despairingly.

"Ye too, I hear, were no whit better in your youth!"

This silenced Dominikova effectually.—Yagna set to ironing some frills for the next day. It was a windy evening, with whistling sounds in the trees. The moon was sailing athwart a sky flecked all over with cloudlets. Away in the village the lasses were singing, while someone scraped a jerky accompaniment on a fiddle.

They heard the Voyt's wife talking as she passed by.

"He went to the Police Bureau yesterday; since then, no news of him."

"Yesterday evening," Matthew's voice returned, "he went to the District Office; and the Soltys says the head official had sent both for him and for the scrivener."

After they had passed on, the old woman spoke again, but less harshly this time.

"Wherefore did you drive Matthew away from us?"

"He was displeasing to me; why, therefore, should he sit here? I seek no man, nor do I need any!"

"But 'tis time—aye, high time—to provide yourself with a goodman! Folk would then no longer attack you so. Even Matthew—he's not to be disdained; a clever fellow, and an honest."

For some time, and very earnestly, she held forth on this theme, but Yagna, busy with her own work and full of her own sorrows, made no reply. So at last her mother gave over, and took up her rosary. It was late in the night. All was quiet, save for the tossing trees and clattering mill; the moon was now quite hid behind dense clouds, though



their edges were silvery, and a few sheaves of light shot out between them.

"Yagna, you must go and confess to-morrow. You'll feel more at ease, when rid of your sins."

"To what purpose?—No, I'll not go!"

"Not go to confession!" Her mother's voice was strident with horror.

"No. Quick to punish, slow to help: that's what the priest is."

"Hush, lest the Lord God punish you for those wicked words!—And I say to you: Go to confession, do penance, beg God's forgiveness; do so, and all may yet be well!"

"Penance indeed! Is mine slight? And for what wrong that I have done, pray? No doubt, because I love, and because I suffer, I am rewarded thus. For me, the worst that can be has already come to pass!" And she went on bewailing herself in her sullen mood of exasperation.

Alas, poor thing! she had no foreboding—no, not the slightest—of the chastisement which was about to overtake her: a chastisement far less foreseen, and far harsher still!

For on the next day, which was Sunday, a rumour spread round the village before High Mass—the incredible rumour that the Voyt had been arrested for a deficit in the village accounts!

At first no one would believe it, and though fresh and more dreadful particulars came in hourly, they were hardly taken in earnest by anyone.

The graver members of the community only said: "The idle love inventing stories and spreading them for a pastime."

They believed, however, when the blacksmith, home from town, bore out every word, and Yankel told the whole village:

"'Tis all true! Five thousand roubles of the community's money are wanting. His farm will be seized for the sum, and should it not suffice, Lipka will have to make up the rest!"

Thereupon a furious storm of protest arose. What! when

they all were in such straits, and misery cried aloud everywhere; when there was nothing more to eat, and many had to borrow, that they might pull through till the harvest was over: was it now that they must pay money for a thief? That was beyond human patience; the whole place went mad with rage, and curses and threats and foul names flew about like hail.

"I was no partner of his: therefore will I not pay in his stead!"

"Neither will I! He had revelled and caroused and had his pleasure: must I suffer now, paying for the pranks he has played?" So said many a one, in sore trouble, and hardly able to keep back his tears.

"Long have I had mine eyes upon the man, and foretold all that has now come to pass. Ye would not hearken then; and now, here you are!" old Ploshka said, not without ulterior intentions; and his wife, like a worthy helpmeet, echoed his words about the place, repeating them to any that would listen.

The tidings were so overwhelming that but few went that day to church, but talked the matter over at home. As the grievance was common to all, so they all complained together in huts and orchards, but especially along the mill-pond banks. What puzzled them most was, where the man could have wasted so much money.

"He must have hidden it somewhere; he never can have spent such a sum!"

"Nay, he has trusted in the scrivener's uprightness, and we know well how far that goes."

"Poor man! he has wronged us all, but himself more than anyone," some of the graver villagers remarked: when Ploshka's wife thrust her portly figure amongst them, and came forward wiping dry eyes, and with assumed sympathy:

"And I say, poor wife!—she that was such a grand and haughty dame—what will she do now? Both land and house will be taken from her, and the poor wretch will have to go into lodgings and work for others! 'Tis not as if she had got some pleasure out of all that money spent!"



"Oh, but she has enjoyed herself very well as it is!" Kozlova bawled, attacking her like Ploshkova, but in a different fashion. "They have both lived like lords, the merry villains!—meat every day, and half a potful of sugar in her coffee! And they both of them drank their rum neat and in tumblers! I myself have seen them bring all sorts of good things from town—half a cartful! What else made them so big-bellied? Not fasting, at any rate!"

She was listened to in grave silence, in spite of the arrant nonsense of her closing words. But it was the organist's wife who decided the attitude of the people. She happened (it seemed a hazard at least) to be passing among them; and, listening to their talk, she observed, with apparent indifference:

"Why, do ye not know on what the Voyt has spent so much?"

They closed round her, and insisted on her telling them.

"'Tis clear enough: on Yagna!"

This was a surprise, and they looked at one another in bewilderment.

"Since last springtime, all the parish has been talking of naught else.—I shall not say a word; but go ye, ask anyone, even down in Modlitsa . . . and ye shall hear the truth!"

Seemingly unwilling to say more, she made as to leave them; but they followed her and literally drove her into a corner. Then she told them, as a secret that was to go no farther, how the Voyt had bought Yagna rings of the purest gold, kerchiefs of the finest silk, and given her lots of coral necklaces and quantities of ready money into the bargain! All these were of course glaring fabrications, but they believed her implicitly. All but Yagustynka, who cried out in a passion:

"Great saints, Snuffle and Cant, pray for us!—Have you seen all this, madam?"

"Yes, I have! And I can swear, even in church, that it was for her he has stolen: aye, and very likely at her instigation too! Ah, but she is capable of any crime;

naught on earth is sacred to her, that shameless, that conscienceless one! The lewd beast, for ever prowling about Lipka, bringing shame and disgrace wherever she goes! . . . Why, she even attempted to seduce my own Yanek, that innocent lad, as pure as a child! But he escaped from her and, coming, told me all! Only think of it: the wanton will not even leave a priest alone!" She stopped, out of breath, for her bitter spite had made her speak at a great rate.

These words had the effect of a spark on gunpowder. All the former grudges against Yagna now sprang into life again—all the feelings of envy and rivalry and hatred; all present gave utterance to what they had to accuse her of, and the tumult became indescribable. Everyone tried to shout down everyone else, and with louder and louder shrieks.

"How can our Christian land support such a monster?"

"And who caused Boryna's death? Have ye forgotten?"

"So she has even attempted to entice a priest! O merciful Jesus!"

"Ah, how much drunkenness and quarrelling and iniquity are all owing to her!"

"She is an ulcer that infects the whole village, and because of her, Lipka is despised by all!"

"So long as she's amongst us, there will ever be sin and wickedness and lechery! To-day the Voyt robs us for her sake; another may do the same to-morrow!"

"Drive her out! Out—like a leper—to the woods and the forests!"

"Drive her out!—There's no help for it! Drive her out!" they yelled, infuriated, and now wrought up to any extremity. On the proposal of the organist's wife, they all went in a body to the Voyt's. They found his wife bathed in tears, and so wretched, so miserably dejected, that they embraced her and wept over her, and consoled with her with the utmost tenderness.

After a while, Yanek's mother mentioned Yagna.

"Ah, 'tis God's truth," the other lamented in despair.



"She is the cause of all. . . . Oh, may she, for the wrong she has done, die like a dog in a ditch, eaten of worms for this my shame, for this my misery!" And she fell back on a settle, torn with fierce agony, and wrestling with a fit of sobs.

They sorrowed and wept over her for a long time; but as the sun was going westward, they at last went home. Only the organist's wife remained; and the two, shut up together, took counsel and talked over a certain measure to be taken. They then both went from cottage to cottage, canvassing the village, and preparing the secret enterprise on which they had entered.

They were joined by the Ploshka women and several others, who embraced their cause, and with whom they visited the priest. He, however, stretching out his open hands before him, said:

"With these things I will have naught in common. I cannot prevent them; but I want to know nothing about the whole business, and shall be going to Zarnov to-morrow for the whole day."

The evening was noisy with quarrels and contradictions and secret plottings: when night fell, all those in the plot repaired to the tavern, where the organist stood treat to them all. There they once more set about debating and deliberating: the foremost farmers and nearly all the married women in Lipka were there. They had been conferring together for some time, when Ploshka's wife shouted:

"Antek Boryna, where is he? All are assembled here, and he is the foremost amongst us; no decision we took without him would be valid."

"Yes, we will send for him; he must come!" they shouted; "we can do nothing till he is here."

"What if he take her part?" said a voice.

"Would he dare to oppose us—us, the community? For we are determined—all, all, all!"

Antek was in bed, but the Soltys woke him up.

"Ye must go and speak your mind. If you will not, then they'll say you are for her, and fly in the face of our as-

sembly! And your trespasses in the past will never be forgiven by the women!—Come now; we must put an end to all this!”

He went indeed, for he could not choose but go; but with a heavy heart.

The tavern was full to bursting, and resonant with a loud droning sound. The organist then got up on a bench, and made a speech like a sermon.

“... Nothing else is to be done! The village is like unto a house, from which, if a thief shall take away one of the foundation beams, another will greedily seize upon the rafters, and a third a log from the walls; and presently the house itself must fall, and crush all the dwellers therein! See then: if amongst us everyone shall be free to rob and slay and do all manner of wrong, behaving lewdly, what will become of the village? I say to you that it will be a village no longer, but a shame and a disgrace to every honest man! that all men will shun it from afar, and cross themselves when it is named! Aye, and I say that sooner or later a judgment of God must fall on such a village, even as on Sodom and Gomorrah! Yea, it will fall, and on all of us; for we shall be guilty, both those that do evil themselves, and they that permit the evil to increase! For what says Holy Scripture? ‘If thy hand offend thee, cut it off; if thine eye hath trespassed, pluck it out and throw it to the dogs.’—Moreover, I say to you, Yagna is worse than the plague, worse than any pestilence; for she sows seeds of scandal, sins against all God’s commandments, and draws down upon us the wrath and terrible vengeance of our Lord. Drive her out, then, while it is not yet too late! The measure of her iniquities is full; the day of reckoning has come at last!” he concluded, bellowing like a bull, with purple face and eyes starting out of their sockets.

“Yes, yes! It is time!—We, the people, have power both to punish and to reward!—Drive her from the village!” they all shouted, their excitement now waxing greater and greater.

Gregory and others spoke too, but were hardly listened to:



the organist's wife was telling of the affair with Yanek, the Voytova pouring her grievances into everyone's ears; and, others joining in to swell the hubbub, the whole place was roaring with the noise.

Antek alone said not a word. He stood close to the bar, gloomy, his teeth set hard, pale with the torments he endured, and at times assailed with a wild craving to snatch up a bench, beat the whole shrieking mob to a jelly and trample them under his feet: so odious they were to him! But he kept himself in hand, though drinking glass after glass of liquor; only he spat on the ground, and swore under his breath.

Ploshka addressed him after a time, and said aloud, for all to hear: "We are at one to drive Yagna from the village: come, Antek, speak your mind on the matter."

A great silence fell upon the multitude; every eye was fixed upon him: they felt sure he would be against them. He, however, drew a deep breath, threw back his shoulders, and answered in a ringing voice:

"I, living with the community, am of one mind with the community. Will ye expel her? Do. Will ye exalt her? Do.—To me 'tis all one."

He pushed the crowd apart and left the place, without even a glance at anyone.

They continued the debate a long time, even till the morning light; but in the end it was quite decided that she should be expelled.

But few took her part; those who did were shouted down. Matthew alone fearlessly dealt curses around upon them all and, reviling the whole village in the utmost paroxysm of fury, left the place at last, and went to beg Antek to save Yagna.

"Do ye know what has been decided?" he asked him at dawn, pale as death and trembling from head to foot.

"I know. Law and custom are on their side," he replied curtly, whilst washing his face at the well.

"To hell with such laws! It's all the work of the organist and his wife. . . . Shall we put up with such injustice?"

—In what has she been to blame? All their accusations are mere lies! . . . Lord! are they to hunt her from our midst, like a mad dog?"

"Would you, then, resist the assembly of the people?"

"Ye talk as if ye were on their side!" Matthew cried, in a tone of sharp reproach.

"I am on no one's side. She is no more to me than a stone."

"O Antek, rescue her!—Do something, for God's sake! I shall go mad—mad! Think of it: what can she do? where can she go? . . . Ah, those villains, those sons of dogs, those wolves! . . . I will swing my ax, and smite, and spare no one!"

"I will not help you in any wise. They have decided: what is one man against them all?—Nothing!"

"Aha!—You have a grudge against her!" Matthew suddenly flashed out.

"Grudge or no grudge, that concerns none but myself!" Antek replied sternly, and leaned back against the well-cover, looking into vacancy. His passion for Yagna, suppressed but not less active, was now raging within him, together with bitter jealousy: both tossing him to and fro, like a tree that groans in the blast.

He looked around him. Matthew was gone. The village seemed a strange place to him—loathsome and blatant exceedingly.

And in the very weather of that memorable day, too, there was something odd and abnormal. The huge swollen disk of the sun shone pallid in the sky; the heat was of a sultriness beyond all that had yet been; the sky was clouded with low-hanging hideous-looking vapours; the wind every now and then sprang up in fitful gusts, and the dust rose in thick whorls and spirals. A storm was at hand; far away, there were flashes along the wooded horizon.

Now had the fermentation amongst the people risen to the highest pitch. They ran about wildly; brawling was heard in almost every hut; women fought together on the mill-pond banks; the dogs were howling all the time.



Scarcely anyone went to work in the fields. The cattle, left at home, lowed plaintively in the byres. Nor was there any Mass on that day, the priest having left the place at daybreak. And every minute the feeling of unrest increased in every mind.

Antek, seeing that the people were gathering on the organist's premises, shouldered a scythe and went off to one of his fields that was close to the forest. The wind hampered his work, waving the corn to and fro, and blowing into his eyes; but he stood his ground firmly and reaped away, listening—now more calmly—to the distant sounds he heard.

"Perchance they are about it at this instant!" was the thought that flashed through his brain, making his heart beat like a hammer. A wave of rage swept over him: he drew himself up and was on the point of tossing his scythe away and running to the rescue of Yagna; he only mastered himself just in time.

"Whoso has done evil must suffer the penalty!—So be it! So be it!"

The rye bent in ripples round his knees, like the waves of a stormy lake; the gale blew his hair about, drying the sweat of agony on his face. He could barely see anything, for he was in spirit at Yagna's side—all of him but his arms, with hard trained sinews working instinctively, wielding the scythe and laying the rye low, swath by swath!

Once, however, there came upon the wings of the wind a shriek, loud and long-drawn-out, that came from the village!

He flung the scythe on the ground and sat down in the corn that rose like a wall around him. He grovelled close to the earth, and clung to it with a mighty effort, and held himself down with an iron grasp. And he kept himself fast, and did not weaken, though his eyes wandered away to Lipka; though his heart cried out aloud in terror; though an awful fit of trembling shook him from head to foot.

"All things must take their course: they *must*! We plough to sow, we sow to reap; and if anything hinder, we pluck it out like an evil weed!"

Thus spoke within his soul an inexorable immemorial Voice.—Whose? . . . Was it not that of the earth and its inhabitants?

He still felt himself rebelling, but now listened to it with more willing obedience.

"Even so. Everyone has the right to defend himself against a wolf. . . . Everyone!"

A few last regrets, a few idle thoughts, came still like stinging gusts of wind, wrapping him in darkness, and urging him to rise and act.

But he started to his feet, whetted his scythe, crossed himself, spat on his hands—and set to work with a will, laying low swath after swath with such furious energy that his scythe-blade hissed through the air, and the walls of ripe grain around him resounded to his strokes.

In the village, meantime, the fearful hour of judgment and chastisement had arrived. What took place there can scarcely be related. All Lipka was as in the delirium of a high fever; the people seemed to have gone stark staring mad. Those of more sensible natures kept within doors, or fled to the fields. The others were gathered on the banks of the pond, and so drunk (if we may say so) with rancour that, before wreaking revenge on Yagna, they had begun to wreak their fury on one another, with spiteful words of hate. . . .

But in a minute the whole multitude had set out to Dominikova's, like a foaming torrent in spate. The Voytova and Yanek's mother led them on, and a howling infuriated rabble followed.

They burst into the cabin like a tempest. Dominikova blocked the way—she was trampled down in an instant. Andrew sprang forward to her aid, and was knocked down at once. Lastly, Matthew, standing in front of the inner door, strove to keep them back; but in spite of the club he wielded with all his strength, not half a minute elapsed before he was lying close to the wall, unconscious and with a broken head.

Yagna had locked and bolted herself up in the alcove.



When they burst the door open, she appeared, standing with her back to the wall; but she neither made any defence nor uttered any cry. White as a corpse, with wide-staring eyes, she shook all over in expectation of death.

A hundred hands shot out to seize her in their greedy clutches, ravenous with hatred; she was whirled away like a bush torn up by the roots, and dragged out into the enclosure.

"Bind her, else she may give us the slip and escape!" the Voytova commanded.

By the roadside stood a cart prepared for her, filled to the very top with hogs'-dung, to which cart a couple of black cows had been yoked. Into the dung they tossed her, bound fast and unresisting; and then, in the midst of a deafening uproar—laughter, foul invectives, imprecations—each a stab of murderous intent—the procession set out.

It halted at the church, and Kozlova bawled:

"Let her be stripped here, and whipped in the porch!"

"Aye," screamed another; "creatures of her kidney were always flogged outside the church."

"Let her be whipped until the blood spurts out!"

But Ambrose had bolted the lich-gate, and stood close to the wicket, the priest's gun in hand; and when they stopped, he bellowed at them:

"The first that breaks in here—as I hope for mercy, I'll shoot him! . . . I'll kill him like a dog!" And he looked so grim, so formidable, with his gun ready to fire, that they forbore, and turned aside to the poplar road.

They hurried on, for the storm might burst at any moment. The sky had grown still more gloomy; the tall poplars tossed to and fro in the gale; clouds of blinding dust flew up beneath their feet, and far-off thunder rumbled.

They cried: "Faster, Pete, faster!" They looked skywards ill at ease, less noisy now, and walking by the roadside, for the middle was deep sand; and only now and then did one or another of her bitterest enemies draw near the cart and shriek:

"You swine! You wanton! To the soldiers!—Go, you plague-spotted harlot!"

Pete, Boryna's servant, was driving the cart, for no one else would do so. He walked beside and flogged the cows, and spoke a few words of pity to her, when he could speak them unnoticed.

"'Tis not far . . . your wrong shall be avenged: suffer now in patience!"

Thus did Yagna, bound, on a bed of dung, the blood oozing from her beaten limbs, disgraced for all her life, unutterably degraded, and supreme in wretchedness, lie neither hearing nor feeling anything around her; but the tears streamed down her bruised cheeks. At times, too, her bosom rose as if to utter a cry—but the cry never came. It stopped within her, petrified.

"Faster, Pete, faster!" they exclaimed, hurrying him along, and impatience partly calming their madness, they now came on at a quick trot, nearing the mounds which were the landmarks of Lipka.

Here they pulled out one side of the cart, made of loose boards, and shot her out, along with the dung, like loathsome offal. A loud thud was heard; she fell on her back, and remained motionless.

The Voytova came forward, and spurned at her with her foot, hissing: "Return to us again, and we'll hunt you away with dogs!" and, lifting up a clod as hard as a stone, and striking her cruelly, she added: "This for the wrong you have done my children!"

Another struck her a second blow: "This for the shame you have brought on Lipka!"

"May you perish for ever and evermore!"

"May you never lie in hallowed earth!"

"But die of hunger and of thirst!"

With these invectives, there rained upon her clods and stones and handfuls of earth; while she lay motionless, looking up into the trees that waved over her.

Then it grew dark, and a dense rain began to fall.

Pete delayed over "something to arrange about the cart,"



so the people did not wait for him, but returned in bands, much depressed and subdued. About half-way back, they met Dominikova, covered with blood and with torn clothes, sobbing and groping her way with a stick. On finding out whom she was passing, she shrieked in a fearful voice:

"Murrain and plague and fire and flood—let them not pass you over!"

At the words, they hung their heads, and fled panic-stricken.

. . . . .

It was a great storm. The sky had grown liver-coloured, the dust flew in bellying clouds; the poplars, with sobbing sighing sounds, were bowed and shaken to their roots; the winds howled, wrestling with the corn, and rushed roaring away to the quivering and murmuring forests. Twisted masses of hail-cloud, slate and copper-hued, hung low in bulging piles and airy hummocks here and there, cloven by streaming thunderbolts of wonderful brightness; though indeed the hail fell only in scanty showers, beating down a few leaves and boughs.

This, with few intervals, lasted all day long and till evening set in, followed by a black, cool, refreshing night.

And the next day it was splendid weather again; a sky without a stain, and the land sparkling all over with dew.

Everything in Lipka was now on its former footing. As soon as the sun was well above the sky-line, they all, as by common consent, sallied forth together to reap; the field pathways and roads were alive with rolling carts.

And as the Mass-bell tinkled from the church, each man stood up in the fields to listen to the sounds: those nearest could even catch the faint notes of the organ. Some knelt down to say their morning prayer, even aloud; some uttered a pious ejaculation, in which he found spirit and strength to work; everyone at least crossed himself . . . and then fell to work with the utmost energy.

Thus did it go on all day: a Divine Service of hard and

ceaseless and most fruitful work. Scarcely anyone remained at home. All the doors of all the huts stood wide open; even the children went afield, the aged and the invalids; and even the dogs, breaking loose from the ropes that bound them, darted off to the harvest-making.

No one was indolent, no one stood eyeing his neighbours' crops; they all, bowed over the furrows, and with untiring diligence, worked hard in the sweat of their brows.

Dominikova's fields alone remained unreaped—forgotten, as it were. The corn dropped grain by grain to the ground, the ears withered up with drought: no one went there, and the passers-by averted their heads not to see the desolation. More than one felt compassion, and cast wistful glances at his neighbours; but he would then fall to work again more diligently than before: it was no time for them to stand contemplating ruin and devastation.

For harvest was now in full swing: day succeeded day, full of the hardest toil, most joyfully supported.

And at last, the weather continuing magnificent, they bound the cut corn into sheaves, setting them up on the fields by clusters of eight, to be brought home to Lipka at their convenience. Now did the ponderous wagons roll along, on every field, through every lane, to every barn in the village. The gathered billows of golden corn flowed out along the ways and in the yards and on to the threshing-floors; a few stalks even floated in the pond, or dangled aloft from the roadside trees, with their yellow bearded stalks; and all the country-side was redolent of the reaped straw and the fresh ripe grain.

On not a few threshing-floors the flails were beating already, for the people were in a hurry to get their corn made into bread. Without, on the vast expanse of stubble, multitudes of geese were gleaning the remaining ears, and flocks of sheep and herds of oxen grazed there too. There, too, some fires had been kindled; and all day long the lasses sang and made a joyful noise, that mingled with calls and rumbling of carts, and made the merry sunburnt faces of the villagers shine still brighter.



The rye was not yet all cut down, before the oats on the uplands were more than ready for the sickle, and you could almost see how quick the barley ripened, and the wheat daily grew of an ever rustier gold. There was no time to rest, not even to eat at one's leisure; they were all so tired, so worn out, that many would fall asleep over their meals; and yet, when they came home in the evening, Lipka thrilled to the merry din of talk and laughter, of music and songs.

Yes, the hard times that came before the harvest were over and gone; the barns were full, there was corn in abundance, and everyone, poor as he might be, held up his head proudly, and looked forward in confidence to the future and the happy times he had so long desired.

On one of these golden days of harvest, when they were bringing in the barley, the blind old *Dziad*, led by his dog, passed through the village. The heat was intense, yet he would not rest anywhere, being in haste to get to Podlesie. This was hard work for him to do, dragging a heavy stomach upon twisted limbs; and he could but move slowly along, stretching out his neck, and listening attentively to each sound he heard. Stopping sometimes near the reapers, he would "praise God," offer them snuff, and—if a coin dropped into his palm—mumble a few prayers, and ask, as it were indifferently, for news about Yagna and the affairs of the village.

He got little information on the first point, however; they answered him unwillingly, and told him no matter what came to their heads.

But at Podlesie, on getting to the crucifix, he happened to meet Matthew, who was not far off, putting the timber for the smith's windmill into shape.

"Please take me to Simon's hut," the *Dziad* asked him, swinging forward on his crutches.

"Ye'll have but little comfort there, where is naught but weeping and sorrow!" Matthew replied.

"Is Yagna still ailing? They told me something in her brain had gone wrong."

"Not at all.—But she is always in bed, and has well-nigh

forgotten all things in the world. Her state would move a heart of stone. . . . Oh, what creatures men are!"

"Aye, to ruin thus the mind of a Christian! . . . But I hear her mother intends bringing an action against all Lipka."

"She cannot win. The decision was taken by the whole assembly: they were within their rights."

"Oh, the wrath of the multitude is a fearful thing!" The *Dziad* shuddered as he spoke.

Matthew flared up hotly. "Fearful, yes; but senseless and spiteful and unjust exceedingly!"

He brought him close to the hut, and went in himself. Only for a minute, however, to come out again wiping a tear away.

Nastka was spinning under the eaves. The *Dziad* sat down by her, and produced a blue flask.

"See, ye must sprinkle Yagna with this thrice a day, and also rub the crown of her head therewith; in a week, all trace of hurt will be gone. The nuns in Przyrov gave it me."

"May God be your reward! Already a fortnight has gone by, and she continually lies there unconscious. Only, from time to time, she makes as though she would flee somewhat . . . and laments . . . and calls upon Yanek."

"And Dominikova, how is it with her?"

"She too is like one dead, save that she is always sitting at her side. Ah, she'll not last long!"

"So many ruined lives, O Lord!—And where's Simon?"

"At present, always in Lipka. He has a great burden on his shoulders now, having to take care of two farms."

She put a five-kopek piece in his hand, but he would not take it.

"'Twas for my own pleasure I brought her the flask . . . and will add a prayer for her besides at the altar of the Transfiguration!—She was ever most kind-hearted, and cared for the poor as but few care!"

"Truly and indeed, her heart was very kind . . . else she might peradventure have had less to suffer."



The sound of the Angelus rose up from Lipka, with the clatter of carts, the ringing of scythes on the whetstone, and some far-off snatches of song: while the dust, golden in the western air, now began to blur the outlines of cabins and fields and woods.

The *Dziad* got on his crutches, drove the dogs away, set his wallet straight, and started off, saying:

"Dear folk, may God be with you evermore."



THE END

A NOTE ON THE TYPE IN  
WHICH THIS BOOK IS SET

*This book is set (on the Linotype) in Elzevir No. 3, a French Old Style. For the modern revival of this excellent face we are indebted to Gustave Mayeur of Paris, who reproduced it in 1878, basing his designs, he says, on types used in a book which was printed by the Elzevirs at Leyden in 1634. The Elzevir family held a distinguished position as printers and publishers for more than a century, their best work appearing between about 1590 and 1680. Although the Elzevirs were not themselves type founders, they utilized the services of the best type designers of their time, notably Van Dijk, Garamond, and Sanlecque. They developed a type face which is open and readable but relatively narrow in body, permitting a large amount of copy to be set in limited space without impairing legibility.*

SET UP, ELECTROTYPED AND PRINTED  
BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC.,  
BINGHAMTON, N. Y. • ESPARTO  
PAPER MANUFACTURED IN  
SCOTLAND AND FURNISHED  
BY W. F. ETHERINGTON &  
CO., NEW YORK • BOUND  
BY THE H. WOLFF ES-  
TATE, NEW YORK

